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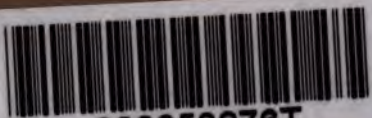
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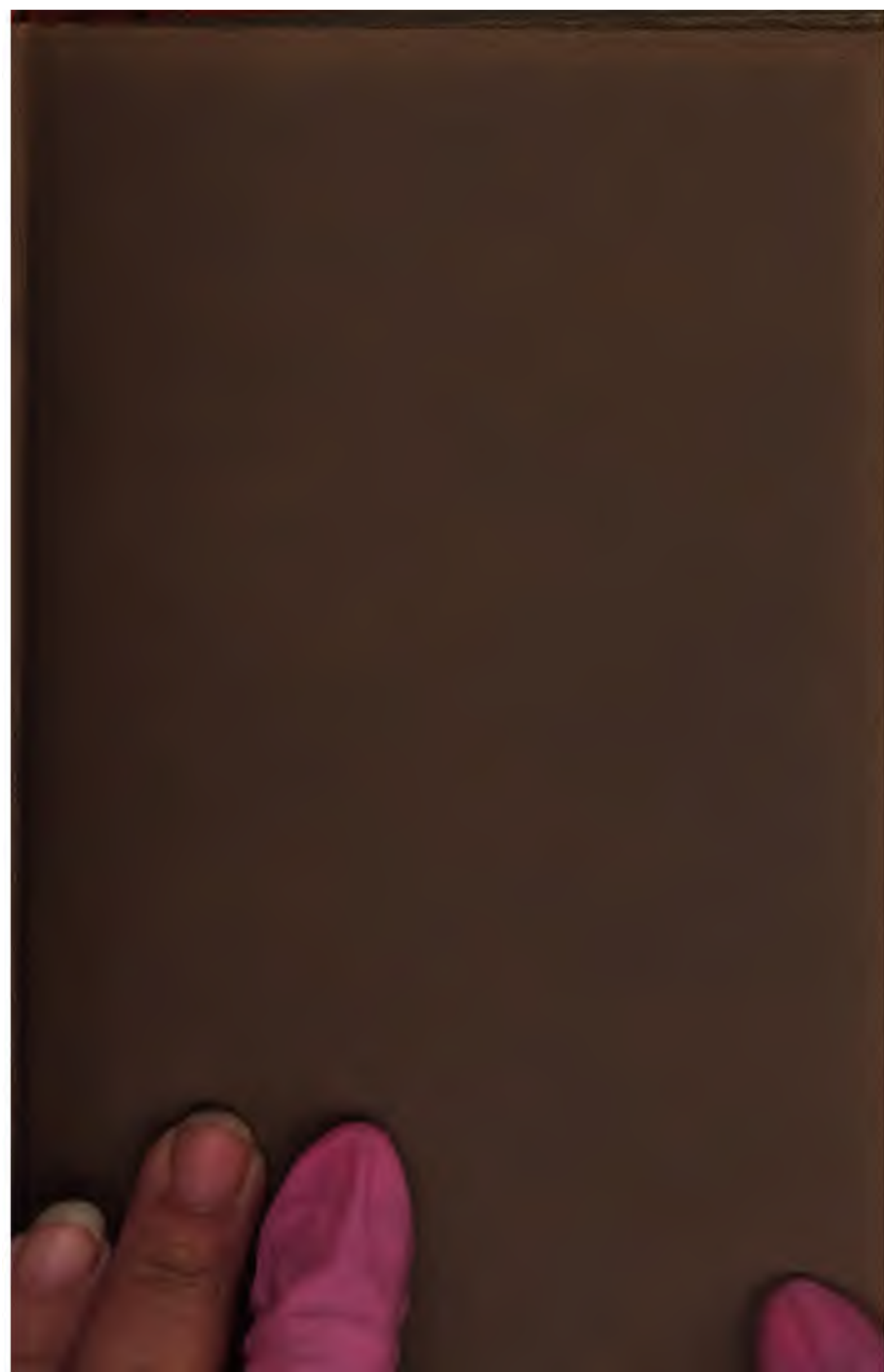
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A GOLDEN SORROW.

VOL. II.



# A GOLDEN SORROW.

BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY,

AUTHOR OF

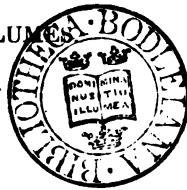
"A HOUSE OF CARDS," "FALSELY TRUE,"  
&c., &c.

"I swear, 'tis better to be lowly born,  
And range with humble livers in content,  
Than to be perked up in a glistening grief,  
And wear a golden sorrow."

*King Henry the Eighth.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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# A GOLDEN SORROW.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE GOLDEN STATE.

“ I WRITE of a land of wonders,” says an American author—“ I write of California while she is still youthful and full of marvels ; while her population is still unsettled ; while her business is still fluctuating, her wages high, her gold abundant, and her birth still fresh in the memory of men and women who have scarcely reached their majority. I write of her while she still offers a wide field for the adventurous, the enterprising, and the young, who have life before them, and wish to commence it where

they may have the freest career, in full sight of the greatest rewards for success, and with the fewest chances of failure."

It was at this period in the wonderful history of the Golden State that Walter Clint and Lawrence Daly left England to seek their fortune there. They were young and imaginative, adventurous and ambitious, though in different ways, and the enterprise had other charms for them than that of its professed and principal object—the acquisition of gold. Lawrence Daly had the stuff in him of which the pioneers of society are made. He would have exchanged the city for the desert, with pleasure and alacrity, any day ; and the disappointment, the final solution of the long-drawn spell of uncertainty, which set him free to make the exchange if he chose, was secretly welcome to him. Walter was of a different stamp, and of a feebler nature ; but he had caught from his

friend some of his enthusiasm, and, in addition to the strong practical motive which had decided him, there arose before his fancy a vision of the great new country, and the wild free life there, with its absolute novelty, which had power to charm him even when he most completely appreciated the price he must pay for its realisation in a long separation from Florence.

To her, indeed, the heaviest portion of this trial was allotted. It is always so to those who remain. An absolutely novel journey, full of adventure and possibilities, with an arduous struggle, and the chances of a splendid success at the end of it, ennobled by a high and independent purpose, was enough to fire a more listless fancy than Walter's. He had not such rich and varied intelligence, so highly cultivated a mind, as Daly's, nor was there so much of daring and endurance in him ; but he was exactly calcu-

lated to follow the lead of a superior intellect ; and his sweet temper, complying ways, and general easy-goingness, made him a congenial companion to Lawrence.

Though society had become to a certain extent organised, and the tide of reckless vagabondism, which had poured itself forth over California on the first discovery of gold, had somewhat abated under the steadily repressive influence of the absolute necessity for hard work and the action of a wonderful system of police, the place whither the friends came from the other side of the world to seek their fortune was wild and wonderful. "Undefined ruffianism" abounded in it still, and that extraordinary mixture of savage roughness and epicurean luxury which is one of the strangest features of "mining" life.

When, in after-days, Walter Clint's wife learned the true story of the caravan jour-

ney from the coast to the mines, performed by Walter and Lawrence, she wondered that no subtle influence had conveyed to her a sense of its danger, its toil, and its privations. Her husband's letters touched but lightly upon these, while dwelling upon the wonderful and beautiful, the grand and terrible objects which occupied their attention. He wrote of the mighty mountains and the boundless plains; of the plateaux where deer and buffalo still abounded, and whence the Indians had not yet been banished; of the deep rich green of the cottonwood groves; of the sycamore and the honey-locust, too soon passed; of the yellow earth, the yellow grass, and the groves of giant sun-flowers. He bade her follow their track, with her fancy, over the Great Plains, so full of life, so lonely, and yet never wearisome, with all the grandeur of monotony, and yet continual change; where

the sparking atmosphere, the never-failing breeze, the solitude which no words can paint, the boundless prairie swell, convey an idea of vastness almost awful, but quite delicious.

Of the places through which their toilsome way lay, Walter wrote much to Florence—of the companions of their journey, little. The rough, wild, wicked men, as some of them were, though many were only harmless, honest, and hard-working; the bad language, the toil, the danger, the irresistible despondency which sometimes attacked them, sure accompaniment of severe fatigue and over-taxed nerves; the sense of utter removal from all the habits of their former life, both physical and mental—these things he did not tell her. They would have terrified Florence, for whom the idea of wild nature had a strong charm, but that of undisciplined human passions

and lawless human life had unspeakable repulsion.

The journey had no exceptional features. Some years ago, every such journey seemed a marvel, and every particular was eagerly caught at. Use has lessened the marvel, and the story has been told so that none can hope to rival the narrator.

They had entered on their adventurous undertaking with but vague information to guide them, and little definite notion of their best modes of proceeding. But they had found intelligent companions, and gleaned a good deal of knowledge on their toilsome way, and had resolved to try Placer County. They allowed themselves only a short interval of rest on their arrival at San Francisco, after the two long sea-voyages and the crossing of the isthmus. The strange and exciting aspect of the great Pacific city, the restless flood of its feverish



life, the amazing variety of character, the extraordinary contrast to every experience of their former lives, had unbounded attraction for the two young men. But they had neither time nor money to spare for the indulgence of their curiosity. The most interesting and romantic portion of their adventurous journey lay before them when they joined a miners' train bound for Placer County.

"The whole county is rugged and mountainous, and much of it is covered with heavy timber;" thus ran Walter's description; "the diggings are likely to last for many years. There is probably no part of the state where the single miner, without capital, has a better chance to dig gold with a profit. This is exactly the place for us, and we have determined to try our luck there. Three men travelling with our caravan are also bound thither. I am get-

ting this letter ready, by bits and scraps, to be despatched from Carson City, when we shall have emerged from the desert. It is a dreadful place, but it has shown me one spectacle which I can never forget. Try to picture to yourself a glittering plain, stretching as far as the eye can reach, in irregular humps, no level ground, no field, no house, no tree, no green, not even earth, only an incrustation of salt and mud, flawed and fissured here and there. This plain is bounded, in the far, dim distance, by lofty mountains of fantastic outline ; but to the right and left it has no bounds, and touches the sky like the horizon at sea. We were plodding along beside a waggon in silence, two days ago, oppressed by the solemn, immense solitude, when an Indian, the chief of some 'braves' of a friendly tribe, whom we have met, pointed to a certain spot on the horizon ; an action which surprised me, for

the Indians seem to me to be totally insensible to the abounding natural phenomena of their wonderful country.

“ I looked, and saw before us a stately river, whose banks were skirted with pyramidal trees resembling poplars. Its water was so beautiful and limpid, the green avenues appeared so fresh, that we panted with longing to reach them. Soon the river seemed to expand and overflow on all sides, forming a sea which bathed the foot of fantastic mountains. Islands with festooned outlines rose from the bosom of this unknown ocean, which was ploughed by vessels of every shape, their white sails swelling to an invisible breeze. Headlands with sinuous, uneven crests, and their sides pierced with mysterious grottoes, stood out from the mountains like the flying buttresses of an old cathedral. In a little bay, in one corner of this picture, enormous whales gambolled on the surface,

and spouted up the water in silvery showers. In the foreground of this marine landscape rose elegant habitations in the Italian style, which seemed to be set in the midst of woods of bushy trees. Then it was an army on the march, with its staff gorgeously equipped, its band, its artillery, its squadrons commanded by chiefs decorated with waving plumes. There were also droves of cattle which quietly grazed beside fat sheep and bounding goats. Whirlwinds of dust rose in lofty columns to the sky, and were reflected in the mirror of the waters. Some of the men of our caravan had seen wonderful mirages in America, Africa, and Oceania, but they said that this one far surpassed them all. Nothing was wanting to captivate the eye, and the details were metamorphosed so quickly that the pencil could not reproduce them.

“Every one in our caravan perceived the

images in the same way—the Indians as well as ourselves; these images were so clearly defined, that we were at first sight borne away by the charm of the illusion, and were a few minutes before we could recognize that it was a mirage. The phenomenon began at one in the afternoon; the wind was blowing from the south, we were journeying to the east. It was more particularly towards the north that the mirage was the most distinct and the most animated. The sun was shining, and the sky cloudless, but the atmosphere did not appear to possess its usual limpidity. At three o'clock the curtain fell on this fairy scene, and we were brought back to the reality of a horrible salt desert.”\*

Lofty hills, their summits crowned with dense woods, peopled with deer, close in a valley which might, for its beauty and its seclusion, be that in which Rasselas learned wisdom and weariness. Far beyond them,

\* See M. Jules Rémy on California.

rolling stretches of wooded land lie basking in the golden sunshine, which touches with its splendour the mighty crests of the giants of the Sierra. From the encircling hills, many sheer descents, through richly wooded depths, thickly strewn with huge granite rocks, lead to the level plain—of vast extent, cultivated at the sides only, irregular and picturesque, forming a wide-stretching strand for a river, bordered with willow-bushes, which runs through it, and throws off many a little rivulet, to wander through the green and brown expanse. One of these rivulets, its flat banks fringed with poplars and willows, meanders through the plain, and passes by the foot of an enormous mass of auriferous rock, which, worn by the constant action of water, has split into fragments, crumbled, loosened, and set free its veins of gold. A streamlet gushes from its recesses, and swirling amid the roots of overhanging pines,

forms a basin at its foot, surrounded with green turf, and then rushes away in a glittering little cascade, over a fall of a few feet, to swell the rivulet. The beauty of the scene could hardly be exceeded, even in the Golden State, which has been declared to be "unsurpassed in the world for climate, scenery, and soil." It is a busy scene, as well as beautiful. The plain is studded with miners' huts; and men in every variety of costume, of many nations, and all periods of life beyond childhood and short of actual old age, are pursuing their unvarying, absorbing task—gold-finding in Placer County. All stages of the operation are going on simultaneously over the vast space occupied by the valley. The claim belonging to Lawrence Daly and Walter Clint is one of those known as "river bed," and their hut is situated on a little strip of stony land, like a slab of stone embedded in shallow earth,

which juts out at the foot of the huge mass of rock already mentioned, and overhangs the rivulet, a few hundred yards below the basin and cascade. Behind the hut, which is of adobe, and in nowise different from the others in the valley, the rocks rise abruptly with their scattered covering of fir and pine, and stretch on for many miles, while the surface of the plain is furrowed and seamed by the relentless search of the gold-seekers.

The door of the hut is closely shut, and there is no sign of any activity or life about it or in its immediate neighbourhood, in which are all the appliances of the occupation of the inmates. For the moment, stillness and idleness reign, and the only living creature visible is a large dog, who lies across the doorway, in an attitude of quiet vigilance, his pointed muzzle resting on his outstretched fore-paws.

About a mile farther down the valley,



there is a cluster of huts, forming a kind of little town, with a rough palisade enclosing it; and in the centre, is a long, low, shed-like building, as large as six huts put together, from whose roof floats the banner of the Stars and Stripes. A motley crowd of men, horses, waggons, unyoked oxen, bales, casks, and inquisitive dogs, occupies the space around this—the most imposing building in the locality. It is known as “the store,” and contains everything, and is the general resort of everybody. Between this cluster of huts and the solitary one with the sentinel dog, the rivulet sweeps round, and enormous boulders jut out from the body of the rocky hill, so that the hut is isolated on that side, and shut out from all knowledge of the busy, swarming crowd beyond it. It looks very quiet and peaceful with the evening coming on, full of the indescribable beauty of that hour on the Pacific shores; and there is

something of neatness and order about it, which indicates that it is not tenanted by low, fierce, or ignorant specimens of the miner population.

As the evening advances, two figures make their appearance, coming round the jutting boulders, and advancing to the cottage. The sentinel dog pricks up his ears, rises, and inspects them. One is familiar to him, the other is not, but the stranger arrives in company with Walter Clint, and Sambo accepts the fact as a certificate of his character and a guarantee of his intentions. The stranger is a young man, very little older than Walter, but taller and stouter. He has red hair, a red bushy beard, and small sharp grey eyes, with sagacity of the cunning sort in them. He wears a motley costume, in which, through the roughness and carelessness characteristic of the manners of the place in this respect, there shews the former

“fastness” of a peculiar type of man, less harmless than the “loafer” proper, and yet not belonging either to the avowedly dangerous classes. He wears a checked shirt, and a flashy tie with a horseshoe-pin in it, and though his boots are high, and pulled over his trousers, they are not miners’ boots.

Walter Clint is altered in appearance since that day when he took silent leave of his wife and his sister at the railway station at London Bridge. He could not personate a candidate for a lady’s-maid’s place now, with any hope of success. His fair skin is tanned to a healthy brown; his hands are more than ever muscular and hirsute; and his figure has developed into undisguisable manliness, under the influence of constant exercise and hard work. There is no mingling of the past and present in his attire; the red shirt, wide-leaved straw hat, and capacious boots, all mean business, and nothing but business.

The two walk briskly on, and Walter enters the hut, preceding his companion,—who looks curiously about him, with a sharp observant glance,—into the room on the right of the doorway. A bare, plain room, but clean, and not quite devoid of comforts, though they are of a makeshift kind, and testify to the ingenuity rather than to the means of the inmates. From stout iron hooks in the rafters, which form the ceiling and the roof at once, a hammock is slung. In the hammock lies Lawrence Daly, dozing, not sleeping, in the uneasy semi-consciousness of low fever. He lifts his heavy eyelids, and looks stupidly at Walter, as he says to him :

“I have succeeded in finding Dr. Deering, and have brought him in with me.”

## CHAPTER II.

## SPOILED FIVE.

"**H**AS he been long ill?" asked the man who had come in with Walter, after he had looked closely at the sick man in the hammock, who made no effort to speak, and seemed almost unconscious of his presence.

"Only two days. I went to look for you, as soon as he fell ill, but I could not find you. They said you had gone to Placer-Ville."

"They were wrong; I was out prospecting with some new chums. How was he taken?"

“Shivering and sickness, just at sundown ; and light-headed during the night. I dared not trust myself, in this climate, though I have done some doctoring in my time in England, and was very uneasy until I made you out this evening.”

Walter then proceeded to tell Deering how he had ventured to administer only the simplest remedies, and Deering approved.

“It’s fever,” he said ; “the regular thing, and no mistake ; but he’ll do ; he’ll pull through. Has a fine constitution, I should say. Doesn’t drink, now ?”

“Never,” said Walter ; “eats and drinks very little at any time.”

“So much the better. That will stand to him now. He will be much worse than this, though ; you must be prepared for that. He has been light-headed, you say ?”

“Yes, very ; rambling in his talk ; trying

to jump out of his hammock ; distressed in his mind. Went on so all night."

"Ah, indeed. You are very tired, yourself, are you not? No rest, I suppose?"

"Not much. There's no one here to help, except Spoiled Five, who is not a bad hand at nurse-tending, only he's terribly afraid of any one who's off his head ; about the only thing he *is* afraid of, I fancy."

"Where is he?" asked Deering, looking round.

"Washing some of our clothes, down yonder," replied Walter. "Shall you want to send him for anything?"

"I think not. The case is not a complicated or a bad one, though I daresay it seems so to you, who are not accustomed to this kind of fever. I will just have another look at him."

Lawrence Daly was very ill indeed. The swift, sudden fever which belongs to the

climate and the occupation, had knocked him down just forty-eight hours previously, after some preliminary menace in the way of thirst and languor. He had borne the fatigue of the journey, and the toil of the new life in the New World, perfectly well hitherto—with unflagging strength and spirits, and Walter saw him succumb to this sudden illness with uncontrollable fear. His affection for Daly had grown with every day of their close association. The hard and rough life which they had shared had not had a hardening or roughening effect upon either of the young men, nor had the many scenes of hardship, violence, and severe struggle which they had witnessed blunted their feelings. It was with a keen agony which nothing in all his previous life had ever caused him to feel, that Walter had recognised the fever in Lawrence Daly's case; and he permitted Deering to see the infinite relief which his



favourable opinion afforded him with perfect frankness. •

This rather amused Deering. He did not believe in anything with particularly vivid faith, and in friendship he was a confirmed unbeliever. To "Every man for himself," the first half of that cynically blasphemous proverb, he would have accorded cordial assent; as to "God for us all," he did not believe in a God, and therefore it did not concern him. He regarded Walter as a very "soft party," quite a novel specimen of the "digger;" and noted, in his quick, observant way, several little precautions for the comfort of the sick man, made with as much ingenuity and completeness as their means permitted.

"Are you brothers?" he asked.

"No," replied Walter; "we are friends and comrades. We came out from England together."

"Ah! well—you'll go back together, as far as this fever is concerned. What is your friend's name?"

Walter told him; and they had some desultory talk about the place and its prospects, while Deering prepared medicine which he had brought with him, and administered it to Daly.

"Have you been here long?" asked Walter of his companion, who seemed disposed to linger and talk. "I did not hear of you until last week, when Spoiled Five told us of the accident at Snake Gulch."

"That was a bad business. I have been in the county three months—a long time for me. I'm a regular rolling-stone, and, accordingly, have gathered no moss, though I'm always rolling in search of it. I shall roll down New Mexico way next."

"Is it not rather a short trial to give a place, to stay there only three months?"

"Yes; but it is not so much the place as myself I give the trial to. I came up with the intention of digging, but I couldn't stand it; and you are all so confoundedly healthy here, it seems to agree with you all so well, there's not much to be done in doctoring. An odd fever, like our friend's here, or a blasting smash like the Snake Gulch business, is about all that's going; and these things are too accidental in their character to give one solid encouragement."

"Especially if 'one' is a rolling-stone," said Walter, smiling.

"Just so. I'll be going now. Keep him cool and quiet. I shall look in, in the morning."

So saying, Deering went out of the hut, and took his way down the valley, now twinkling all over with lights, towards the cluster of huts surrounding the store, whence the sounds of anything but select revelry,

and fun both fast and furious, were borne towards him. They were welcome to Deering, who was a cautious gambler, and in the habit of picking up not a little of that kind of moss, of which he denied the possession, among the miners, from whose uproarious assemblage he was rarely absent, though he had no fancy for sharing their serious toil. Walter Clint and Lawrence Daly had frequently heard of him during the three months he had passed in that part of the county; stories of his luck at monte and euchre, and of his skill as a doctor, had reached them; but he was, until now, personally unknown to them.

Walter returned to the side of his friend, partner, and patient, who was still slumbering, in the uneasy, fitful sleep of the fever.

"What had I better do?" he muttered. "I cannot leave him. He will be much worse, very bad indeed, this Deering says,

and I dare not leave him. And yet, it is not safe to keep the gold. Spoiled Five has warned me twice. The waggons start on Thursday ; I must make up my mind by then."

His face was troubled by more than the grief of Lawrence Daly's illness, as he sat beside the hammock, far into the night. Daly rambled less than on the previous night ; the medicine had calmed him to some extent, but there was no rational talk between them. Towards morning, Walter himself slept soundly, and was roused only by the dog's vociferous welcome of an arrival at the door of the hut. He had thrown himself on the top of a locker, which stood under the window of Daly's room, and contained the greater portion of their worldly goods, and had fallen asleep with his head in an angle of the wall. He sprang up, aching and confused, and with a horrid sense of

having neglected the sick man. Had he been asking vainly for water? Had he been suffering, untended? Apparently, neither. His appearance was unchanged; and Walter, after a glance at him, admitted the person who had knocked.

This was a short, thick-set man, very lame, with a shock head of red hair, and only one eye. The blind side of his face was much disfigured by a rugged scar which traversed the cheek-bone, and by the loss of the eye, which had evidently been destroyed by an accident, and in place of which there was now only an ugly seam, crooked and leaden-hued. The right and sound side had a pleasant expression, and the one bright brown eye had a surprising, contradictory merriment in it, confirmed by the uninjured handsome mouth and strong white teeth. From the fingers of the left hand all the ends were missing; they had suffered by the same ac-

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cident which had crippled him and destroyed his eye; and the circumstance had inspired the wits of the diggings with the happy idea of calling him "Spoiled Five."

He was as well known in the valley as the "innocent" of an Irish mountain village is to all the country round; and, considering that he had come out there from Ireland a strong young man, full of health, energy, and industry, and had been reduced, within a month of his arrival, to a state of entire helplessness and hopeless dependence, without the remotest prospect of ever seeing his native land again, "Spoiled Five" was a wonderfully contented individual. In that rude and cosmopolitan place his affection for the old country never declined; among that lawless and godless crowd, his fidelity to the old faith had never faltered. He picked up a livelihood by making himself generally useful, and it was quite wonderful what he

could do with his one "good" hand and its maimed fellow. Washing, carpentering, glazing, tailoring, in the modified and modest form of mending, cooking, a surprising readiness in repairing everything that went wrong with vehicles of all kinds, a by no means contemptible knowledge of farriery, and a wonderful knack of "minding" the sick—these were some, and only a portion of the accomplishments of Spoiled Five. He made a very good living for himself by their employment, and had become quite an institution and a tradition of the place. He was the oldest inhabitant now. Many men of many nations had come there, and had made their pile, and gone away, or had failed to make their pile, and likewise had gone away to the other parts of the Golden State, or to other occupations. Many had died there, of injuries, or disease, or drink, but Spoiled Five remained, contented enough. The old



folks at home, for whom he had been bent on making a pile, were gone to their rest, and there were to be no new ties in life for him. He hated yellow-men and "loafers," but otherwise was always on very good terms with the mining population of the fifty or sixty miles of the valley over which his habitual wanderings extended—for he was very migratory; and he had of late attached himself particularly to Walter Clint and Lawrence Daly. Spoiled Five's one eye was a remarkably quick one, and had recognized immediately on their arrival that the new chums were gentlemen, and Daly an Irishman; and he made himself very useful in the first days of making acquaintance with their strange location and their wild neighbours. By this time it was generally understood that they had the first claim on the services of Spoiled Five.

"How is he the day?" asked the lame

man, as he came in with singular noiselessness, and deposited on the locker several incongruous articles which he had brought up from the store. Walter gave him a report of the patient, told him Deering's opinion; and the two then proceeded to prepare breakfast, and to attend to Daly's wants. The adobe hut consisted of two good-sized rooms, divided by a passage terminated by a door at either end, and a long low apartment in the rear, which served as kitchen and storeroom. This latter was the scene of Spoiled Five's operations, while the friends talked together.

"Your head is clearer to-day, Lawrence."

"Yes, for a while, but I feel uncertain and giddy. That medicine stupefies me. I must speak to you while I can. Don't stay with me, Walter, I entreat you. Remember the warnings we have had. Take the gold to the station when the waggons go. Spoiled

Five will remain with me ; you can trust him, surely, to do all that is necessary ?”

“Don’t be uneasy, my dear fellow,” said Walter, evasively ; “the gold will be all right. No one knows anything about the nugget, and we are not worth the risk of robbing, for the rogues are in a great minority, fortunately, and would have no chance of escape. Spoiled Five has been misled by his imagination this time. You will be all right in a week or so, and then I can go.”

“It is very unfortunate that I should be knocked up just now,” said Daly, turning his hot eyes wearily on his friend, and passing his hand across his forehead, as though he were trying to clear away a mist which hung before him, “when our unexpected success has come. What does Deering say ?”

“That you will be all right very soon ;

that you must be looked after, and must *not* excite yourself."

"Ah, yes," said Daly; and then he turned his head away, made another effort to clear away the mist, and remained silent.

Deering had judged Daly's case correctly. When he arrived the next day, he found the patient much worse; the fever was running its regular course. So it went on for many succeeding days, during which the acquaintance between Walter and the "rolling-stone" doctor ripened into a semblance of intimacy. It was, however, only a semblance, being one-sided; for, whereas Deering learned many particulars of Clint's previous career, and the history of his life at the gold mines—for Walter was reticent only on the subject of his marriage, which he never mentioned—Walter learned nothing about him more than the general rumour had already told him, and Deering's free-and-

easy description of himself had confirmed.

The story of the enterprise of the two young men had nothing in it to distinguish it from that of hundreds of others who had undertaken similar arduous experiments. It had included danger and discouragement, tremendously hard work, very repulsive associations, many things which had not entered into their calculations, much welcome excitement, great vicissitude, and on the whole, up to the present time, a fair measure of success. They were not, indeed, making a rapid fortune; they were not of the number who furnish the romance of Californian history, of the heroes of the "Frisco" gaming-saloons and gold mart. They had been nearly two years at the mines, had been working six months in their present claim, and had begun under tolerably favourable conditions. They were not dissatisfied, but the pile was far from being made

yet, though they had sold three lots of gold to the bankers at the nearest station, and were collecting another, intending to take it thither in company with several miners who were going on a similar errand, and were to have started a few days later than that on which Daly's illness commenced.

They had been working, one day, since the early morning, and at some distance apart, each hidden from the other's observation by a high intervening bank of earth, when Walter, resting from his labour at the sluice, heard Daly shouting to him. He ran quickly to the turn of the ravine where his partner was at work, and found him bending over a mass of mud and clay which he was knocking about with a pick.

"What is it?" said Walter, scrambling to Daly's side through the abounding clay and slush.

"It is a nugget!" replied Daly; "and un-

less I very much mistake, it means home for us, Walter—at least home for you and England for me !”

“Ye’re looking mighty cheerful to-night, Misther Clint,” said Spoiled Five to his patron, late that evening, when he dropped in upon one of his innumerable errands. He might have lived in their hut altogether ; but he never would be persuaded to do so, preferring his own “little bit of a place,” a curiously tiny cabin under an abutting crag half-way between the solitary hut and the “town.” “Maybe it’s letters has come, somehow ; though I haven’t hard of any.”

“No, Five,” said Walter, laughing ; “there are no letters that I know of. *Do* I look very jolly ?”

“Bedad, ye do, sir ; ye look as if ye’d found the four-laved shamrock.”

“Don’t know the vegetable in question, Five. What’s it like ? What colour is it ?

Yellow? Anything like what we're looking for all day long here, and find so precious seldom, and so little of it? Eh?"

Walter was going on in his gay, reckless way, when he was checked by a look from Daly, and stopped, rather awkwardly. Spoiled Five, busily engaged in feeding the dog, was not so much occupied as to prevent his seeing this look. He replied as if he had not seen it.

"Misther Daly can tell you. Sure, he's offen hard tell of it at home. More be-token, there's them here that's seen it, and afther it other things that was plazin' to them, and brought out the luck. Don't ye mind the fella that struck goold down in Mariposa County?"

"No," said Walter. "At least, I don't know whether I've heard of the chum you mean."

"It was long afore you came. He was



attacked by a robber, an' he got his arm loose an' fired at him. Didn't the first bullet hit a spot of rock just behind the robber's showldher ; and didn't he get another offer at him, and do for him wid the other one ! And then, didn't he look to see what it was makin the rock shine so mighty bright where it was sthruck, and didn't he find quarts of goold in it !"

"Gold-bearing quartz, you mean, Five," suggested Daly.

"Maybe so, Misther Daly ; but anyhow, it was a boy from County Westmathe that done it, and he had a four-laved shamrock round his neck, along wid his scap'lar ; and if Misther Clint doesn't know what that is, sure *you* do, sir."

"Yes, yes ; I know all about it, Five ; but I don't think the shamrock is a growth of these parts. Take your glass, Five ; it's there on the locker."

Spoiled Five took up the small pewter measure, called by courtesy a glass, and having pulled a lock of his shock hair to the gentlemen—for he had not discarded the customary courtesies of his country, even amid such discouraging surroundings—said, as he slowly turned the liquor round and round, “Thank ye, sir; and here’s your health, and Mither Clint’s” (his once bright brown eye was full of fun and meaning); “*whatsomever yez has found*, here’s wishin’ ye full and plenty of them.” Whereupon he promptly departed, and took his way to his “own little bit of a place.” “Isn’t that quare, now?” he said to himself. “There’s Mither Clint ’ud tell me in a minnit they’d found a nugget o’ goold; and there’s Mither Daly, that comes from my own townland, and he’d hide it from me av he could. Musha, then, them English isn’t so ’cute after all!”

## CHAPTER III.

## WARNING.

**B**EFORE that evening, Walter had received intimations from Spoiled Five which had occasioned him some uneasiness. In his desultory, exceptional sort of life among the busy community, all labouring after a similar fashion for a common end, he heard and saw much which he was quite unsuspected of knowing. It was probably fortunate for him that he was unsuspected, for he might otherwise have incurred some risk, as it was extremely improbable that the dangerous members of that mixed community would have understood the paradox-

ical fidelity which was one of his chief characteristics.

Ireland is prolific of "informers"—the executive has, unhappily, never been at a loss for such despicable and corrupt tools with which to do the inevitable dirty work of government—and yet there is no country in the world in which the "informer" is held in such ruthless detestation. No matter what befalls him, however terrible his fate, the popular verdict is "served him right." The wretch who betrays his fellow-men for the government pay is a moral leper, a creature absolutely apart and debarred from all human pity, one who earns his filthy wages carrying his life in his hand, and when he loses it, is just so much dead carrion. There is nothing in the social system of France more admirable, which makes a deeper impression on the foreign observer, than the parental and filial relations as we see them

there ; and yet there is no country in the world in which the hideous crime of parricide, held by the ancients to be virtually impossible, is so frequent, or perpetrated under circumstances so appalling, and from motives so depraved. How are these two paradoxes to be explained? Of a surety, the French and the Irish nations possess the defects of their qualities.

Spoiled Five had the true Irish horror and hatred of an "informer," carried to its extreme ; for supposing he had been mixed up in any equivocal transaction, not only would he have regarded the betrayal of a comrade as an entirely damnable sin, but he had a deeply rooted aversion to being a party to any kind of detection whatever. He was a perfectly honest, sober individual himself, singularly industrious and tranquil in all his ways, and so little given to conviviality that he sometimes risked his popularity

with his rough though rarely unkind employers by his lack of disposition to drink and smoke, and his scanty appreciation of howling joviality. But he had a native lawlessness in him ; he hated police, and he would lend a hand to the rope which should hang a spy, any day ; while his usual vigilance and keen intelligence would be suffered to slumber strangely, if the matter in hand were the bringing of any other kind of delinquent into "trouble."

Without fully understanding his character in these respects, Walter Clint had an impression that, in conveying to him a warning that he would do well to send the dust lately washed to the nearest station for purchase by the bankers without delay, Spoiled Five had given a strong proof of his attachment. He had not made any explanation, but had merely pressed the matter as an earnest request, muttering something vague about

“quare people” being about. Walter had told Daly what Spoiled Five had said, and found him unwilling to attach any importance to it. Everything had been very quiet lately, and they had not had any reason for apprehension in consequence of the isolation of their hut. Neither rumour nor their own observation led them to believe that there was any fresh element of disorder, any addition to the average of rowdyism, in the place. They had not a large quantity of “dust” ready, and, but for the finding of the nugget, which was, they had no doubt, of very considerable value, they would not have thought of profiting by the approaching opportunity of transmitting what they had to the station, with the security afforded by numbers. But the finding of the nugget made all the difference, and it was arranged that Walter should join the expedition.

It was with singular approbation that

Spoiled Five heard this. Of course it confirmed his impression that some piece of exceptional good fortune had befallen the partners; and his vexation was proportionate to his short-lived satisfaction, when the confirmation of Deering's opinion was made manifest by Daly's increasing illness. It was quite clear that Walter could not leave his friend, who continued for many days unconscious of his presence, and in a state of troubled delirium positively appalling to Spoiled Five, who, if he was not, as Walter had said, afraid of nothing else, was very distinctly afraid of that.

"Holy Virgin!" he would say, with awe, which made the ejaculation half a supplication, "listen to him now! Isn't it dhreadful to hear him goin' an like that; it's he must have the bad mind, I'm afeerd, though his ways is so quiet and aisy." It became so evident to Walter that their faithful assistant



was becoming seriously shaken in his good opinion of Lawrence, by his wild ravings and denunciations of imaginary enemies, that he endeavoured to keep him away as much as possible. Deering laughed at the man's ignorance and at Walter's consideration, much to the indignation of Spoiled Five.

"Nothing to do with his thoughts, with his past life, his goin's on hasn't. Ay, bedad, I'm goin' to believe *that*, amn't I, for him or any docthor! Maybe there's no Miss Kate, then; that's on his mind for some rayson best known to himself? And who's that ould Clibborn he tuk me for last night, I'd like to know; and let a roar out of him as if he was stuck wid a knife? Sure, they say when a man's dhrunk he tells the truth, and why wouldn't he tell it when he's mad! Av it was the docthor there, I'm thinkin' he wouldn't be too pleasant to listen to."

After a few days, Daly's illness took a

favourable turn, and he began to mend rapidly. Walter had suffered very much from both fatigue and anxiety, and was in great need of rest, when, late one night, after he had almost begun to despair of Spoiled Five's return from the store, whither he had gone several hours before to make some purchases, the man came in, and said, with great seriousness, that he had something important to tell him. His manner effectually roused Walter.

"Is Misther Daly asleep?" he asked.

"He is. Why?"

"Because he mus'n't hear what I'm goin' to say. Come out behind the house with with me, sir, av ye plaze."

Walter complied.

Spoiled Five planted himself against the low wall, and taking hold of Walter respectfully, by the sleeve of his red shirt, said, in a low, but decided voice, from which his

habitual drawl was almost entirely banished,

“Misther Clint, you and Misther Daly has known me for a good bit now; did yez ever know me to pry into your affairs, or to make yez an impident answer, or to tell yez a lie?”

“Certainly not, Five; nothing of the kind. You have been our best friend in this strange place, and perfectly trustworthy.”

“Thank ye, sir; that’s hearty, anyhow. Well, then, ye’ll listen to what I tell you, and you’ll be said and led by me? Won’t you?”

His ugly disfigured face and his maimed figure acquired intense expression from his passionate earnestness.

“Won’t you?” he repeated, tightening his grasp on Walter’s sleeve, and slightly shaking him.

“I think so, Five. But you must speak out, before I promise.”

“I’ll spake out, at laste in as far as I can ; but you’ll have to take my word, and not ask me for raysons, or for proofs—for that’s just what I can’t give you. There’s quare people about, and the best men in the placers is gone to the station, and ye’ll mind what I tould you afore, Misther Clint ?”

Walter inclined his head in assent. He was listening eagerly, watching the man’s scarred face intently.

“There’s disappointed people here ; and when men has come all across the world to do the kind of work that’s goin’ here, and meets wid disappointment, if they’re anyway bad at all, they’re not far off desperation. I can’t say more about *that*, and I won’t. I don’t know what you and Misther Daly found, nor where ye found it ; I didn’t ask you, and I don’t want to know.” He saw that Walter was going to speak, and he

stopped him by a quick movement of his mutilated hand.

"No, sir; don't tell me. I beg and pray of you not to tell me. Whatever you found, and wherever you have it, if it's about the premises, hide it—hide it, sir, somewhere away from the hut, and let *no one* but yourself know where it's hid. Do it at once, sir; do it as soon as there's light; that will be in an hour; don't let me know anything about it. Let *me* mind Mистер Daly—I'll lie on the floor in the room, and he'll never know it isn't you; or, if he calls you, I'll have some excuse ready—but do it, Mистер Clint, do it, if you want to bring what you've got safe home to them that's waitin' for you an' it. And tell me nothin' at all about it; that's all I ask, for my own sake."

"But," said Walter, as Spoiled Five loosened his hold upon his sleeve, and stood waiting his reply, "you will surely tell me what

you apprehend, and who are the dangerous parties?"

"No, sir; I won't. I'll tell you nothin' but what *I have* tould you. But if ye don't mind me, if you don't be said and led by me, you and Mither Daly will only be sorry for it once, and that'll be all your life long."

He glanced up, along the frowning face of the huge rock which rose, a black mass, behind the hut, towards the clear, steel-like sky, already beginning to flush at the approach of the swift-coming morning, then limped into the hut, and softly entered the room in which Daly was sleeping the deep, restful sleep of convalescence, curled himself up on the floor beside the locker, and resolutely shut his one eye, in dogged determination, if not in slumber.

Walter remained motionless on the little stony plateau at the back of the hut, where Spoiled Five had left him. All his inclina-

tion to treat the Irishman's warning lightly had disappeared. He had no perception, no suggestion presented itself to him of the quarter from which danger was to be expected, or the form in which it might come; but he was entirely convinced by Spoiled Five's manner and words, and he resolved to act at once upon his counsel.

The light was spreading over the face of the sky before Walter, now all unconscious of fatigue, left the spot, having matured and considered his plan of action. Then he went out, stepped down into the rugged road, and from thence rapidly climbed a stony path which led to the brow of a ravine, forming a portion of their claim, distant about a quarter of a mile from the hut. The place was perfectly silent and solitary, the mining tools were lying about, the whole scene was peaceful. He gazed from the top of the ravine at a spot where the rugged earth was

scooped deeply out under the ragged edge, and after a few minutes' search, his eye lighted on the spot he was looking for. It was a large piece of rock which stuck out from the earth ; and exactly beneath it, at an interval of about six feet, there was another—the two forming natural slabs, by whose rough sides were clumps of stringy, harsh, brownish vegetation. The lower of the two slabs was so placed that a strong active man might reach it by a spring from the winding path, which was, in fact, a dry water-course, that led upwards into the ravine, on the side opposite to that from which Walter had approached it. He once more looked cautiously all round, and rapidly retraced his steps to the hut.

A couple of hours later, when Walter had lain down to rest in his hammock, and Lawrence Daly was thinking of getting up, when the hut and its surroundings wore a most



unusual aspect of stillness and idleness, Deering, making an early visit to his patient, found Spoiled Five sitting on a wooden bench before the door, arrayed in a rough leathern apron, and cleaning all the arms belonging to the establishment.

"I'm doubly glad to find you quite off the sick-list," said Deering, after he and Daly had talked for some time, "because I shall have no hesitation about starting to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Are you going so soon?"

"Yes; going to Sacramento, and thence on the 'roll' I told Clint I meant to try, down New Mexico way."

"And when to England?"

"That the Fates only can tell. I have no particular wish to get back. Have you?"

"Well—yes—I think I have. I don't take very kindly to any other country for long at a time. In that sense, I'm a wanderer

too. But we can't go back until we've got what we came for."

They talked of the prospects of the county, and of the State generally, and exchanged some common-places about the chances of their meeting again. Presently, Walter, who had heard the voices on awakening, came in. He was looking pale and tired. He wore a short canvas coat over his digger's shirt, and in one of the gaping dog's-eared pockets there was a small green leathern case, considerably the worse for wear, which served the manifold purposes of purse, portfolio, and housewife. He shook hands with Deering, and seated himself in his favourite place on the locker, leaning his head against the wall. Daly told Walter that Deering was leaving the place on the following day, and Deering offered to take charge of any letters they might have ready, to be mailed at Sacramento.

This was a welcome offer to Walter, who had written to Florence at intervals during Daly's illness, and also to Miriam, and was very glad of an opportunity of securing a comparatively early dispatch of his letters. They were ready ; he had only to put that intended for Florence into a cover, enclose it in the letter for Miriam, and direct both to Mrs. St. Quentin, at the Firs, Drington, Hampshire. The letters were in the leather case in his pocket, and he got writing materials, which he placed on the locker, and then pulled out the case, produced the letters, and was about to write the addresses, when Deering interrupted him.

"What's the matter with your wrist, Clint?" he asked. "It is bleeding, and you are smearing the edges of your letters with blood."

"Bleeding !" exclaimed Walter, holding up his hand, and, in doing so, pushing the

letter-case, which he had mechanically closed, off the locker, whence it fell on the floor. "So it is! I cut my wrist with a bit of stone this morning, and, washing my hands now, have set it bleeding again. It's a nasty deep three-cornered cut too." He was twisting a handkerchief round it, when Deering said :

"Stay; I'll do it up for you!" and took out of his pocket a leather case containing a few small surgical instruments, and a provision of lint and sticking plaster. With the aid of these materials he fastened up the cut in Walter's wrist, after a fashion which he declared to be very comfortable, though it stiffened his hand, and caused him to write the names, "Miriam" and "Florence," upon the several letters intended for his sister and his wife, in a formal and constrained manner. This done, and the letters confided to Deering, Walter cleared away the writing

materials, and resumed his customary position.

The three young men talked on for a considerable time. There was no very strong or real liking between them ; but they were of the same class in society, living among men who, for the most part, belonged to inferior classes ; and the kind of association which theirs had been, if it had less bearing on the future than the associations of less exceptional phases of society, had greater importance in the present. When at length Deering announced that he must go, and was taking a cordial leave of Daly, combining good wishes with some final professional instructions, Walter declared his intention of accompanying him a bit of the way. He would see him past the bluff, he said ; and they were leaving the hut together, when Deering saw his leather instrument-case lying on the floor, in front of the

locker. He picked it up, put it into his pocket, and they went out.

At first they talked exclusively of Daly, but after awhile, observing Walter shade his eyes with his hand, though his broad-leaved Panama hat sheltered them already, Deering asked him if he felt ill.

"No," said Walter ; "it's only the glare of the sun : it is hotter than usual to-day, I think ; and I was up all night, and feel queer."

"Indeed ! Anything wrong with Daly ?"

"No," Walter answered, rather confusedly ; "I had something particular to do which kept me up, and I was always bad at doing without sleep."

"I should say so," said Deering, quietly, "for you are inclined to stagger now ; only you are guarding against it at every step. Don't come any farther, I beg ; and don't neglect yourself in any way just now. You're overdone."

He stood still as he spoke, and put out his hand. They had reached the bluff by this time, and, with some friendly words, they parted, Deering walking quickly on, and Walter watching his receding figure so long as it was in sight.

“He’s a queer, restless fellow, and rather a bad lot, I suspect,” thought Walter. “I wonder whether I shall ever see him again!”

“What the devil was he doing,” thought Deering, “that kept him up all night, and made him look so confused? I don’t think he rightly knew what he was saying. Shouldn’t be in the least surprised if he were in for the fever!”

## CHAPTER IV.

## BETWEEN DARK AND DAWN.

A DAY or two later, the friends held a consultation over their affairs. Daly was sufficiently recovered to make it safe to do so, and they had a good deal to discuss. Walter carefully avoided inspiring Lawrence with the degree of uneasiness which Spoiled Five's warning had communicated to himself. He told him that he had buried the nugget for its greater security, and found Lawrence rather disposed to laugh at his caution. As was natural, their talk turned on England, on the possibilities of the future, and on those in whose life their success would make



such a difference. There had been so much of the hard and practical in their life, that they had long left off day-dreaming, and it was a relief to indulge in it again for awhile. It was pleasant to talk of how Walter could go home, and claim his wife, and leave his father to make friends with him, or not, as he chose, which they thought he probably would not choose. Men of his sort of temper chafe more under the knowledge of the independence of others than from any other cause. Florence had told Walter in her letters that Mr. Clint was civil to her in her assumed character; but that was no reason why he should pardon its assumption. No; he must build no castles on that foundation; but it did not matter very much; he could not care a great deal now. He had come to think of pecuniary independence of his father, as the one end to be desired and won. They were

talking of the change in their looks since they had left England.

"I look rather cut up just now, don't I?" Lawrence asked.

"Indeed you do. Your face is half as long again as it was, and as thin as a razor. But you will be all right in a few days."

"It doesn't much matter," said Lawrence, with a slight tone of regret in his voice. "There is no one to fret over the spoiling of *my* beauty; and you will go home with yours improved. You see, that's the great difference between you and me; you have so much to go home to, and I have so little. Nothing, indeed, except for your sake and your wife's—I never can forget how the brave little woman trusted me—I might just as well stay here, or anywhere, as go there."

"I wish you had known my sister," said Walter, after a pause.

“What put that into your head just now? Do you think we should have fallen desperately in love with one another, and made things comfortable by two stolen matches in the family instead of one?”

“Not exactly; and yet I don’t know. I think you would have liked Miriam. I wonder how she could ever bring herself to do what she has done. It was so unlike her!”

“There I think you are wrong,” said Daly; “if I may say so, knowing your sister only from your description. I fancy she is ambitious and determined, and that she could not endure the sort of life which, you know, you, with a young man’s comparative liberty, could not stand. She gave you much that sort of explanation, did she not? I think it is satisfactory.”

“I don’t. Of course she could not stand the life; but to get out of it in that way was

unworthy of her. I can see, in every line Florence has written to me about it, how *she* regards it."

"No doubt; but you must not expect every woman—not even your sister—to be endowed with such delicacy of mind and simple good sense as your wife's. She is, in addition to all this, a romantic little party, and believes in love to an extent not warranted by human experience. Mrs. St. Quentin may like her husband well enough, though not so much as your wife would think necessary."

"Perhaps so; but she doesn't write like it, and Florence does not write like it. Of course, it is only by experience that any woman can come to understand what she does in marrying for any motive but love; but instinct ought to have taught a girl like Miriam that it must be a losing game. She never mentioned his name in her last letters

to me; they were full of her travels, and her acquaintances, and of everything but her husband and her home."

"Perhaps she is not of a domestic turn. There *are* such women, though Mrs. Clint would not like to believe or admit the fact."

"I can't tell whether she is or not. She never had any home she could love while she and I were together. But she has a fine nature, with all her self-will and worldliness—she certainly is thoroughly worldly—and is generous and true beyond any woman I ever met."

"True to you, you mean—true where she loves; otherwise, there's an offence against abstract truthfulness of character in her marriage, I think."

"Yes, there is. I did mean true to me. Perhaps she is not a very frank person in general. I daresay she would not be alto-

gether scrupulous about the way of doing anything which she or I wanted to have done. But *I* cannot blame her for *that*, having profited by it, as I have done. She has behaved splendidly to Florence. Poor girl, it has been a weary time for her, even with all Miriam's kindness and sympathy! What would it have been without them?"

"Thank Heaven, it is nearly over for her and for you too."

"For her and for me!" said Walter, looking up in surprise at Daly. "Why do you say *that* so distinctly; as if the time had not been long for you too, and is not for you drawing to an end?"

Daly laughed. "You are as sharp as a woman, Walter, and as suspicious. I may as well tell you I have been thinking of sending you home without me; only thinking of it as yet. We were talking, just now, of the very different motives of your life and

mine. I have not much there, and I have nothing here; but Deering has been talking to me, and has bitten me, I think, with his rolling-stone fancies. This New World is so large, and I have seen so little of it. There's something irresistible to me in the idea of the vast space, and the immense variety of human species one may see."

Walter was much distressed to find such a purpose had presented itself to Daly's mind, and endeavoured to persuade him to relinquish it, by every means in his power. Daly told him again that he had not made up his mind, but had merely been set thinking by Deering.

"A bad lot he is," said Walter, "though he did pull you through the fever. A cunning, dangerous fellow, I'm sure, who never did anyone any good."

"He does not seem to have done himself any," said Lawrence. "He does not let out

much about himself ; but he has been roaming about since he was eighteen—he did tell me that much—and seems no nearer settling down than at first. I daresay he has led a queer life, if one could only know about it.”

“ Which one can’t. And yet what a way of worming things out of other people he has ! I didn’t like him a bit, and yet he knows as much about me as I should tell to the person I liked best—he knows all about me, in fact—except that I’m married—and I daresay he has a pretty general notion of your past and present also.”

“ Yes ; I have nothing to hide—certainly not a sweet, pretty, little wife, as you have—and, as he seemed interested about our friendship and partnership, I told him our story—‘ short and simple annals of the poor ’—and how that old ruffian in India had treated me. He said rather a good thing,



by-the-bye, characteristic of him, I fancy : ' Why the devil didn't you go out to India, and make it deuced unpleasant for the old screw ? You'd have brought him to reason that way, and done it much cheaper than coming out here.' It wasn't worth while to explain to him that I did not look at it in that light. He would have made himself unpleasant in some way to old Clibborn, no doubt."

" I am sure he would," assented Walter. " I wonder Deering hasn't got on better ; he's the sort of man that ought to get on, if there's any good in pushing and self-assertion."

" I fancy the vagabond strain in him neutralises those undeniably useful qualities."

Then they talked of the probable value of their nugget ; of when the next opportunity of conveying gold to the station under safe escort would be likely to occur ; and of

when they might hope to receive letters from England. It was now a long time since any communication from home had reached them, and Walter was getting very impatient. He did not even know where Florence was. When he had last heard from her, she was at Naples, where Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin meant to remain for the Winter and the early Spring; from thence return to England. Her letter was written only a short time before that of Mrs. Ritchie had come to create an entire change in her life, actual and prospective. They referred to its contents, and to Florence's mentioning that Miriam was sitting for her portrait to a famous painter at Naples.

"She is very handsome, is she not?" asked Daly.

"Yes; I think so. Her features are not very regular, and she has not much colour, people say; but I think her face lovely—

the expression is so bright and fearless ; and her eyes are splendid—large golden eyes. Can you imagine an eagle's eyes, with all the brightness left in them, and a great deal of exquisite softness added, on occasion ?”

“ It is not an easy effort of imagination, but I think I can. That is just the kind of beauty I have imagined sometimes, but I never really saw it. But, Walter, a woman like your sister must have married a rich man ; she never could have been happy in an obscure position.”

“ No,” said Walter, carelessly ; “ I suppose not. At all events, she has done it, and there's no use in grumbling.”

“ How delighted she will be to welcome you to her home ! Where is St. Quentin's place ?”

“ I don't know that he has one. Neither Miriam nor Florence has said anything about it ; and as to her welcoming me, that must

depend in a great measure on my venerable brother-in-law. I have rather a curiosity to see the old fellow. I daresay he is not a bad sort, if he were not Miriam's husband."

"There you go again! One would think you were her mother, Walter, you are so hard to please. You have just said, very sensibly, that, as the deed was done, there was no use in grumbling; and there you are, grumbling again!"

"I beg your pardon, old fellow," said Walter, with his usual gay good-humour, "for bothering you with my guesses and forebodings about the fate of a woman whom you never saw, and perhaps never will see, though I hope you may. I have been boring you horribly all this time."

"Indeed, you have not, Walter. Everything that interests you interests me also, and I have the utmost curiosity to see Mrs.

St. Quentin. Moreover, I am not at all inclined to doubt that it is much better for my peace of mind that I shall see her first, if I see her at all, *as* Mrs. St. Quentin. How very white and tired you are looking!"

"I *am* tired. I think I will turn in for a good night's rest, and so get rid of my headache."

Nothing was said between the two of the care as tender, and the watching as vigilant, as any which a woman might have bestowed, lavished by Walter on Daly; but between these two words were not needed. Their hearts were knit together in one of those friendships which have the gravity, dignity, and simplicity of the higher class of male character, united with the partial affection which women feel for one another. It had grown out of a casual association into one of the most enduring ties which human feeling can create, and it was wholly unin-

jured by the great superiority of Lawrence to Walter. Just before they parted for the night, Daly said :

“I don’t exactly understand where it is you have hidden our nugget, Walter. You must shew me the spot to-morrow.”

“I made an exact memorandum of it in my pocket-book, like the man in Edgar Poe’s story ; only it’s not in cipher—and I don’t mean that any one else shall read it. Nothing like being business-like, you know. But as to shewing it to you to-morrow, it is out of the question. It’s a good way up the ravine, and a steepish climb to get within sight of it. Don’t flatter yourself you could do the distance, or anything like it, even on the level, as yet. Deering cautioned me about your tendency to imagine yourself too well, and tire yourself.”

The solemn beauty of the night was at its

deepest and grandest, and the isolated hut itself was hardly more tranquil than the clustered dwellings lower down in the valley. A great hush had fallen on all the striving and labour of the place ; and the murmur of the streamlets, inaudible by day, save at the falls, might be heard under the awful height of the sky. The great rifts in the rocks, the ditches, the dams, all the appliances of the search in which the population of the great valley worked their bodies and strained their minds to the utmost, looked like deserted ruins, gaunt, ugly, and desolate in the midst of nature's vastness and majesty.

If the solitary hut had had less rude and prosaic surroundings, it might have been accounted picturesque ; but as it was, it was only solitary and grim. Walter Clint was not destined to the good night's sleep which was to cure his headache. There was a strange restlessness upon him, against which

his resolution to sleep was powerless, and which set at defiance all his efforts to control his mind, and force it into pleasant tracks of thought. Why could he not think of home and Florence, of the success which had come to him and Daly, and the possibilities which that success opened up for his future? Why did all these subjects of reflection seem unreal, wavering, dreamlike, and all sorts of trivialities—quaint sayings of Spoiled Five, scraps of miners' gossip, the colour of Deering's neck-tie, little bits out of books he had read long ago, rhymes which he and Miriam had made when they were children, the face and voice of a lecturer whom he had heard at one of the medical schools in London, innumerable trifling occurrences of yesterday, of last year, of ten years ago—why did these things come into his aching head in crowds, rushing and tumbling over each other? If they would even have come



one by one, so that he might think of each separately, for the instant of time which it would require, and get rid of it! But there was no such relief. All these crowding ideas were worthless, silly, teasing; but he could no more separate, disperse, rid himself of them than he could govern the movements of the insects which filled the dazzling air in the golden evenings. They wearied him inexpressibly, but he was powerless under their swarming attacks. The hiding of the nugget. He would think of that! He was determined to think of that. That was a fact; he had done it; he could not exactly, or indeed at all, remember why, but he had done it, and of course he could think of it, could recall every little incident of his task. No; he could not. When he tried to retrace in his fancy the path by which he had ascended the ravine, he found himself a young boy again, running along by the hedge which

bordered the road leading from the Firs to Mr. Martin's house at Drington. Here was Mr. Martin feeling his pulse, desiring him to put out his tongue, promising him jam with his physic. Very odd ! A little while ago, he was a long way off, with a man whose name he ought to know, but could not remember, in a distant country, where were great mountains and a pitiless desert, broad rivers and herds of strange beasts, rough men and a train of waggons. He had been riding among them only a minute ago, before he was working at the sluice out there. Out where ? How could there be a sluice and miners' tools, a locker and a man with red hair and a red beard, in the little garden before the cottage in George Lane, where Mrs. Reeve was lying dead ? He must get up, and see about this ; he could not permit it. The captain of the ship would not allow such encumbrance ;

how came those things on the deck? He must turn out—it was his watch.

How was this? He was on land, not in a ship, but striving to burst open a locked and barred door, but whether he was wildly anxious to get in or out of the place which the door defended, he was not sure, he only knew that there was urgent need of him at the other side of those locks and bars. He struggled with all his strength, and, it seemed to him, with the strength of many others besides himself, to wrench them open, for there were whispering voices calling to him, and stealthy steps creeping up to him, and now he must flee. And the locks and bars! Stay; he had the secret of them; they were old acquaintances of his; he had slid through them many a time when he was a boy. Why, he was a boy now, and he must get out of the house noiselessly, to escape from

his father. The bolt is slipped, the key is turned, and Walter stands on the stony plateau, the huge rock frowning blackly upon him, and the awful steel vault of the sky, a million miles, it seems to him, above him. To be sure, it is up there he wants to go : he knows all about it now ; that was what was whispered close to him ; and he rushes out with a shout, and flings his arms up, as though they were wings, and he were trying them, but is tripped up, and brought down prone upon his hands and face, by something which lies in the deep shadow. He utters no sound, but clutches at this substance, and lies, partly beside, partly over it, shuddering, until, in another minute, Lawrence is on the spot, and investigating that heap by the light of the steel vault and the stars. Besides Walter, it consists of a dead dog and a dead man : of Sambo,

dexterously choked by a loop at the end of a long line ; and Spoiled Five, whose skull is shattered, probably by the butt-end of a pistol.

## CHAPTER V.

MARKED "IMMEDIATE."

**T**O drag the living man away from the dead, into the hut, as speedily, and with as little injury to his insensible body as possible, for he was too weak to lift Walter, and could literally only drag him by his arms—to lay him down within the entrance, and replace the fastenings, was Daly's first action; his second to blow a shrill blast upon a metal whistle, the concerted, well-known signal of danger and distress. He then fetched his revolver, all the chambers charged, laid it on the ground beside him, and once more resumed his efforts to bring Walter to con-

sciousness. The interior of the lonely hut presented a strange spectacle, as Daly, ghastly with horror, and weak with recent illness, strove, all alone with his seemingly dead friend, to loosen the clenched teeth, and unclothe the stiffened hands, ignorant of whether they were surrounded by desperate enemies, and without any clue to the crime which had been committed. What had brought Spoiled Five there? Had he come thither with any evil intention, or to watch and protect them? These and innumerable other questions had presented themselves to Lawrence Daly, to remain unanswered, before he had the relief of seeing Walter's eyes unclothe. At length they did so. It was only for an instant. He shut them again, with a groan and a convulsive shudder, but life was in him. Once more Daly sounded his whistle, long and loud, and this time Walter started and writhed at the noise ; struggling into a sitting

posture on the floor, and stared at Lawrence, without the least recognition in his burning, glassy eyes. He groaned heavily again and again, but made no resistance while Lawrence half led, half dragged him to his hammock. By this time there was a stir in the valley, and men carrying torches were coming along the road towards the hut. There was security in the sound. No attack having been made before the alarm was given and acted upon, there was none to be apprehended now. The murderers had evidently decamped. Daly put on some additional clothing, and waited, listening eagerly for the aid that was coming. The voices and the torches drew nearer, the tread of many feet came up along the stony path, past the bluff, and close to the plateau. The dawn was already spreading, and in a few more moments a crowd of eager men surrounded the hut, and were clamorously demanding



particulars of the murder, which Daly was quite unable to give them, while a few were minutely examining the body.

They were a rough lot, and horrid sights, in a general way, affected them very little, but this one roused the indignant compassion and disgust of every man among them. It was such a dastardly crime to kill this maimed creature, so useful, so harmless, so familiar to them all. Every man among them knew Spoiled Five, and his preference for Daly and Clint was also well known to them. Daly could tell them no more than that the murdered man had had vague apprehensions of danger to them from some quarter which he had not indicated, and had presumably been watching the hut, without their knowledge, on this fatal night. Lawrence accounted for himself on the occasion, thus : he had slept soundly after parting with Walter, until awakened by a noise at first

inexplicable to him. Thinking, for a moment, it must have existed only in his fancy, he listened for a repetition of it; then instantly started up, and rushed out at the back of the hut, where he saw the scene already described.

A minute search of the premises was instituted, but no clue to the perpetrators of the crime was found. While some of the party carried the murdered man into the hut, and laid him on a rough table, one of them bethought him of inspecting the dog, which had been kicked aside, and was lying against the outer wall. The man moved the poor dead brute with his foot, turning him over on his back, and then bent down and minutely examined the loop and line with which he had been choked.

"Whar wer this yer dog when you come out?" he asked Daly, who replied that Sambo was close to Spoiled Five's body:

they were in a heap together ; he could not tell more exactly than that. The man pushed the dead dog over to the spot from which the dead man had just been removed, and taking the end of the long line, he walked away with it to the four points in succession, carefully examining the ground in each distance. On the fourth occasion, he lifted up his head with a satisfied air, and dropping the line, lounged into the hut with his hands in his pockets.

“The dog was chucked up from yonder,” said he to Daly. “There’s good hiding behind that bit of crag, and somebody’s been sittin’ agin the bush, and squeezed it flat. The trick’s been done by a chum with a tidy notion of the meanin’ of the lasso. I guessed it when I saw the loop, so well greased and taut.”

And then, thinking, probably, that he had given enough time and consideration to this

matter, about which so many others were busying themselves, he lounged away.

The rude but usually effectual forms of justice, as practised in the State, were all complied with in this case, but without result. If a momentary suspicion lighted on Walter Clint as the possible perpetrator of the deed, it was only momentary. There was no conceivable motive; and Daly's account of the anxiety which the unfortunate man had shewn for the safety of their "dust," even in the modified form in which only he was aware of it, combined with the universal acquaintance with all the good and bad characters in the place which Spoiled Five was known to have, removed the crime in one sense from the category of mystery: A plot to rob the tenants of the isolated hut had no doubt come to his knowledge. His peculiar ideas of honour and fidelity at once hindered him from betraying, and prompted

him to prevent it at the risk—at the cost, as it proved—of his life. Daly's conjectures were as endless as they were unavailing. Did the murderers know of the existence of the nugget? Had they come for that, as well as for the "dust;" and had Spoiled Five met them, and told them their search would be vain? Had they murdered him, in revenge for his having circumvented them? How much likelihood there was in these suppositions, he could not know until Walter should be in a condition to tell him whether Spoiled Five had admitted to him more knowledge of their success than the ambiguous sentence which he had spoken to them jointly: "*Whatever yez has found, here's wishin' ye full and plenty of them;*" until he could learn from Walter whether the murdered man had any cognizance of his morning's work in the ravine. How soon their success had lost its flavour! With

what horror and bitterness it was dashed ! Of how little value the gold seemed to him now—when, of the two human beings who only, out of all the swarming multitudes who peopled that vast continent, had loved him, one was a disfigured corpse, and the other was in the deadly gripe of fever. Of how little value ? Of none ! He loathed it ! He was glad to remember that he did not know where it was, that it was put away, out of his keeping, out of his sight, in the earth again, somewhere—and that it should trouble him no more, until these calamities should be somewhat overpast.

The murderers kept their secret as securely as the earth held its treasure. They were not detected, though suspicion lighted in several directions, and much increased vigilance was enforced. Even upon that motley community, it produced a grave and unpleasant impression that the perpetrators

of so dastardly a crime should go unknown, and unpunished in the midst of them; and the victim was daily missed among his familiar haunts. They buried him in a green and peaceful spot in the valley, already peopled with many dead; and then it was discovered that no man knew his name. Lawrence and Walter had never heard it—he had been “Spoiled Five” by traditional usage long before they came to Placer County. A rude wooden cross marks the place of his burial, bearing the familiar name cut deeply into its transverse beam, in perfect good faith, unassociated with the smallest idea of irreverence.

There was no lack of help for Daly in the task he had now to fulfil. There was general and genuine feeling about the friends, who were getting such a strong turn of trouble, and any number of rough

miners would have been available in Walter's need. For many days Daly had no hope that he could recover. The fever was so unlike that which had attacked himself, so much worse, more violent, more exhausting; and it had been hard for him, a stronger man than Walter, to fight with it and beat it. Had he even yet beaten it? he sometimes asked himself, when he felt the utter lassitude and depression which invaded his powers, alike of mind and body, making him despair of everything. But they told him he must expect to have these sensations for many a day to come. And they told him that Walter would recover, long before he could bring himself to hope for such a possibility, and had told him so many times while yet he refused to believe it.

It was hard to look at Walter, and think that health and vigour could ever come to



him again. For some time, indeed, reason seemed to be totally extinguished. He altered so awfully in appearance, that Daly dreaded to look at him ; and when he was not before his eyes, was haunted by the distorted, yellow, hollow, foolish face—the face that was not Walter's at all, but a dreadful mask fastened on his body by the fever-fiend, a mask which sometimes grinned idly, and sometimes was set in a grim despair, but never, never once, through long days and nights, looked like Walter, or ceased to be foolish and mad ; for its grin of laughter, and its grim lines of grief, were alike motiveless and unmeaning.

Daly's mind was constantly occupied with thoughts of Florence. How was he to write the truth to her when Walter should be gone ? This was in the first days, when he was hopeless. The candid, confiding face of the young wife, when she had

schooled herself to the great sacrifice of parting with her husband, rose up before his mental vision, and abode there, until he could bear it as ill as the actual sight of Walter. There was in that look such trust in Daly, such innocent obedience, that the remembrance of it was very painful. How should he tell her? If Walter died, what would her fate be? Daly could secure her from absolute poverty, and rescue her from her false position in Reginald Clint's house; but where should she find home and friends, if the truth were known, if the foolish project hitherto carried out by the brother and sister were overthrown? He had not been a party to Walter's plan for putting his wife under his sister's protection—he had known nothing of it until it was successfully carried out. And now he felt that Walter's death would change the entire aspect of affairs. Mrs. St. Quentin, with all her affection for

her brother, her generous kindness to his wife, and her fidelity to her promise, was not a free agent. He should be the young widow's only efficient friend. She should have the whole of the produce of the joint toil of himself and Walter, and he would begin over again on his own account. For many days his meditations were of this dismal kind, and it was while all the appearances were strongly against Walter's recovery that the party who had gone down to the station with "dust" for the bankers, returned, bringing with them a great bag of letters for the miners.

Daly's share in the excitement which such rare occasions produced was very great. He had no strong ties to England or Ireland now, and though he had made arrangements—in case of any communication being addressed to him by Mr. Clibborn—for its reaching him in the New World, he regard-

ed such a contingency as so improbable that its existence as a possibility excited no emotion of expectation or suspense within him. He was always anxious and interested for Walter's sake, and on this occasion he was doubly so. Supposing Walter should recover, if not to convalescence, at least to reason, and awake up to the cares which were now obscured by his illness, it might be of infinite importance to have letters from home to soothe and divert him. So Lawrence heard of the arrival of the letter-bag with anxious hope.

He could not leave Walter, to go to the "town;" but it was not necessary. Many a volunteer would have run down and back, even in working-hours, for letters for the lone hut, and Lawrence knew he should have them quickly, if any there were.

It was evening, and Walter, who had been restless and rambling all day, had

become quieter. His wan and sunken face was not, Daly thought, so unlike its former self, as it had been in the morning. The crisis of the fever must be near, and he had, for some hours, entertained a hope, not hitherto admitted, that Walter's strength might suffice for the passing through it—and was now watching him intently. He was alone with the sick man, which rarely occurred, as, since the miserable death of Spoiled Five, their neighbours had been more neighbourly, and one or two women even had come from a distance of several miles to offer their services. There was perfect tranquillity immediately around the hut, but from the distance came the innumerable sounds of mining life in its play-hours, and under circumstances of unusual excitement. An occasional murmur of uneasiness, or a moan of pain from the sick man, was the only sound within the hut.

The little cottage in George Lane, where he had seen Walter's wife for the first time, came back vividly to Lawrence's remembrance. He thought of her pretty young face, timid, but not weak, of her unaffected composed manner, and of the womanly sympathy with which the simple story he had told her of his life, hitherto so wasted and disappointed, had inspired her; and a longing came to him, stronger and greater than before, that that young life might have brightness and peace in it. It would be cruel, needless, he thought, that such a harmless creature should be made so miserable. He was full of heart-sickening compassion for her unconsciousness of the doom which might be impending over her.

He heard men's steps and voices, and presently was called by his name, and went out in the front of the hut. Two miners had come up, and brought some letters and a

welcome batch of English newspapers. The letters, three in number, were all for Walter ; one was directed in Miriam's hand, two in Florence's. The men went away in a few minutes, and Lawrence went into the hut with the letters, examining the post-marks. The latest was on one of Florence's letters, and she had written "Immediate" on the back, with several lines dashed under the word.

"Poor child !" thought Lawrence ; "she fancies her plea of urgency would be heard out here ! If she only knew that Walter cannot read the letter, now that it has come to him !"

He placed the letters carefully in the locker, and looked over the newspapers while he waited for the arrival of the woman who had undertaken to watch by Walter for that night. But he had not read for many minutes when he threw down the paper,

took out the letters, and selecting that one which was marked "Immediate," broke the seal, and read in the first lines :

"MY OWN WALTER,—*Our separation is at an end. This is to tell you that you are to come back at once.*"



## CHAPTER VI.

MRS. DIXON.

“WELL, here’s a letter from Mrs. St. Quentin at last !” said Mrs. Ritchie, the housekeeper at the Firs, to a satellite housemaid, one morning towards the end of Spring, when even the neighbourhood of Drington was looking beautiful, and the gloomy old house was touched by the all-pervading sunshine which its perverse construction and position could not enable it altogether to evade.

“She’s took her time,” remarked the satellite, not deeply interested in the matter ; “but master don’t care, seemin’ly. He wouldn’t break his heart, if she didn’t come

back. I've heard him tell her she knew no more about illness than a dog or a cat; nor, indeed, so much, for they could keep quiet when they was wanted to."

Mrs. Ritchie was not attending to these remarks. She was reading the long-expected letter, and when she came to its conclusion, she turned back to the beginning, and read it through again, before she spoke.

"Well, I'm sure!" was her first observation, awakening the curiosity of her companion, who glanced eagerly at the document.

"Well, I'm sure! What next?"

"What first? *I* should like to know, if you don't mind telling me," said the satellite with impatience barely tempered by respect.

"Mrs. St. Quentin ain't coming at all! And I telling her about Mr. Clint, as plain as I could!"

“Why ain’t she coming? Won’t the old gentleman let her?”

Mrs. Ritchie was too much surprised to remember her own dignity, and the impropriety of such a designation for the son-in-law of the house.

“I don’t know why she is not coming; she does not tell me. She only says she cannot come; but she is sending Mrs. Dixon to take care of Mr. Clint.”

“Lor!”

“Yes, indeed. Well, it’s their business, not mine, since I’ve done my duty by writing to her. Mrs. Dixon will be cleverer than I take her for, if she can manage him, or mind him. It’s more than her elders, or betters, *I will* say, can do.”

The satellite was still looking at the letter with greedy eyes; and Mrs. Ritchie condescended so far as to read it out for her.

“I am very much obliged to you for

writing to me, and distressed at the account which you send me of my father," wrote Miriam. "It is unfortunately out of my power to return to the Firs at present, and yet I am very unwilling that you should have the entire trouble, fatigue, and responsibility of his state of health thrown upon you. I have therefore determined to send my maid, Mrs. Dixon, to England, and she will assist you in any nurse-tending which my father may require. You will remember that she is a person to be depended on, very handy in case of illness, and that my father has once or twice availed himself of her services. You will not, of course, let him know that I have sent Mrs. Dixon to the Firs with this purpose in view, as he might not like it. It will be enough that he should know that I request his permission for her to remain at his house, where she will make herself generally useful, until

Mr. St. Quentin and I return to England. I think my father will make no objection. I depend on you to arrange all this, and am sure you will find Mrs. Dixon very steady and useful. I have directed her to post this letter in London, so that you will be prepared for her arrival very shortly after it reaches you"—

"Lor!" interrupted the satellite; "Mrs. Dixon may come to-day, perhaps. Where's she to sleep?"

Mrs. Ritchie had a reason of her own for not answering this question immediately. She was a shrewd and a kind-hearted woman. The first quality made her aware of the difficulty of obeying certain injunctions contained in a portion of Mrs. St. Quentin's letter which she had not thought proper to read aloud; and the second made her very desirous of complying with them. The other servants had not been jealous of

Rose's privileges while Rose's mistress was in the house with her, to keep her almost entirely occupied with herself, and make her more of a companion than a mere lady's-maid. But Mrs. Ritchie had too much experience to expect that they would be satisfied that Mrs. Dixon should be treated with extra consideration under the present circumstances. And yet Miriam had written : " You will, I am sure, make Mrs. Dixon as comfortable as possible. She has had a good deal of trouble, I believe, in her life, and she likes to keep very much to herself, and she is not very companionable with any of the other servants here. She will be more useful if she is left entirely to herself, and has the charge of my father's rooms. I daresay it will not be any additional trouble to let her have my former rooms, until I can come, and, as you will remember, she always had her meals there."

"She's no loss downstairs, anyhow," was Mrs. Ritchie's reflection, "for she's nothing but a poor, pale kill-joy of a creature, and never wants to lay her needle out of her hand, and have a bit to eat, or a spell of chat, like another. Still, they won't like it. However, that's neither here nor there : it is a great thing for me to get some one to take *him* off my hands—and they must lump it. I'm not going to offend Mrs. St. Quentin for their fancies and feelings."

So, when the satellite repeated her question, Mrs. Ritchie said, with an air of mature consideration : "I think, Susan, the very best thing I can do is to give Mrs. Dixon the room Mrs. St. Quentin slept in. She can keep all her needlework and traps in the sitting-room, and be out of everyone's way there, and not far off Mr. Clint, if she really takes to looking after him, and he will let her."

"As you please, m'm, of course," said Susan, with an indication of sniffing; "but I never did hear of a lady's-maid being given a best bed-room."

"You'll hear of it now, and see it too," said Mrs. Ritchie, briskly, for she had no notion of her authority being disputed; "and what's more, I think I shall give Mrs. Dixon her meals in her own room. She has very prim ways with her, and I remember Miss Miriam telling me she had made it a point, when she went to the school to be engaged, that she was not to have her meals with men-servants. She was brought up very strict, it seems."

"Very nonsensical, *I* should say," remarked Susan, with a decided sniff this time. "Poor servants have little enough to amuse them, without making hermits of themselves."

"*That's* true!" assented the housekeeper, heartily; "and if she prefers to shut herself



up, I'm sure *we* shan't miss her—nor Robert neither. However, we shall see when she comes. Open the shutters, Susan, and dust the rooms out, at all events. I must go and tell Mr. Clint what Mrs. St. Quentin wishes."

"I wonder how he'll take it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure ; it depends on his rheumatism."

"And on his temper," muttered Susan, as she slowly ascended the stairs, and Mrs. Ritchie crossed the hall towards the dining-room. "Mrs. Dixon must be a regular soft one, or uncommon fond of Mrs. St. Quentin, to come back here, after she had got away, without her ; and to attend on that old brute. I'd see him and his daughter farther first, I know ; and Robert will think the same, I'll go bail."

Things were thus shaping themselves so as to render the fulfilment of the task which she had taken upon herself less difficult than

she could have hoped or expected ; while Florence was travelling towards the Firs.

Her courage had not ebbed under the trial of parting with Miriam, or the little disagreeables of her solitary journey. Mrs. St. Quentin had been much distressed by the necessity of Florence's travelling alone ; but the latter put the consideration so completely aside, as to make Miriam feel it had done discredit to the common sense of both ; and she made her see the needless risk of commenting upon it to Mr. St. Quentin. That gentleman had received the intelligence of Rose Dixon's intended departure with unfeigned satisfaction, and plumed himself immensely upon having carried a point quietly but firmly, which it would have been ungentlemanlike to have insisted upon vehemently. He had never been able to discover what it was that Rose Dixon helped his unexpectedly unmanageable wife to " carry

on," nor had he been able even to make up his mind as to what it was that he suspected her of "carrying on" with this perfidious aid; but he felt that it would be a great relief to get her out of his sight and Miriam's company. The demon of jealousy might not torture and tempt him so keenly then. At all events, it would be much easier to watch his wife, when she should have no one near her familiar with incidents and associations of her past life, to encourage her, and to help to delude him. The replacing of Rose Dixon by an Italian woman, a total stranger to Miriam, should be his task: she must not speak a word of English—Miriam did not speak Italian with sufficient fluency for confidences—and this woman should be in *his* interest. Mr. St. Quentin relaxed his teasing vigilance towards Miriam from the hour in which she coldly announced the news to him, and the sisters-in-law had a good deal

of almost unrestrained companionship during the week prior to their parting. Florence had a curiously keen perception of the state of Mr. St. Quentin's mind, and it filled her with apprehensions for Miriam ; for she knew that Mr. St. Quentin's morbid jealousy would be only allayed by her departure, and would again resume its active sway over him. The time passed without her dwelling much upon her own actual circumstances, until she found herself in the train travelling from London Bridge to Drington. A terrible sense of loneliness, dreariness, and apprehension came over her as she stood alone upon the platform where she and her husband had exchanged that dumb farewell, where his hand had so closely grasped, so reluctantly quitted hers—and sight had seemed to be struck from her eyes as her yearning gaze lost him in the crowd.

Florence left her luggage at the Drington Station, and walked up to the Firs. A thousand emotions agitated her, a thousand fears assailed her. Inexpressible sadness was in all her thoughts of Miriam, and of the "way of escape" she had taken, as Florence feared so rashly. How young they both were, her sister-in-law and herself, and how friendless! Many a vision of the possibilities of the future came to Florence, before she turned in at the wide, low, green gate, with its heavy transverse bar, which swung back with a sound oddly familiar after all those months of absence, and began to discern the gloomy house in the dull plateau of unkempt grass. But not one of them prefigured, ever so faintly, that which was really to come to pass.

A great fear fell upon Florence when she stood at the door waiting for admittance, a fear which she summoned up all her strength

to dispel. After all—the first deception of her position accepted as inevitable, as out of her control—she was at least doing the best she could. Walter's father should be a sacred charge and duty to her; she would endeavour so to serve and tend him, that if discovery should arise, she could plead for herself and for Walter something like a fulfilment of the filial relation on her part, even though done under false pretences. Her natural sweetness and gentleness would be pretty certain to help Florence through the complications of a difficult position, but she was not likely to be able to take them into account.

Mrs. Ritchie received Mrs. Dixon—she had obtained the customary brevet rank on her mistress's marriage—with civility, and invited her to tea in her own room, though she explained, to her great relief, that she was to have Mrs. St. Quentin's for-

mer quarters. It did not require much skill to baffle, while seeming to satisfy the curiosity of the household concerning the lately married couple. A vivid account of the glories of foreign lands, of the entertainments at which Mrs. St. Quentin was an admired guest, and the generally "jolly" life she was leading, sufficed. Of course, the old gentleman was very proud of her? Of course. And so he ought to be. So he ought to be, indeed. Then it was Florence's turn to be inquisitive, and yet to keep a painful restraint upon her anxiety, lest it should pass the bounds of what she might be supposed to feel. Mrs. Ritchie was ready to give her full particulars, and also ready to indulge in speculations of her own, and to cross-question the new arrival respecting the exiled son. Did Mrs. Dixon know what news of Mr. Walter was contained in the letter to Mrs. St. Quentin which she had sent on

to foreign parts? And did Mrs. St. Quentin think her brother would return and be reconciled with his father? Mrs. Dixon was in ignorance on these points, beyond the general fact that Mr. Walter was doing well out in the gold country. An awful place, Mrs. Ritchie had heard, where people were murdered as often as not, and nobody ever got hanged for doing it. She really wished Mrs. Dixon had known Mr. Walter, for, for her part, she never expected him to come back any more—her feelings and her dreams went against it, and she was an uncommon sharp dreamer. It was not to be denied that Mr. Walter had been hardly used; and there wasn't one in Drington, as knew anything about it, who did not think so, as well as she.—He had been rather wild, had he not? Wild! Why, bless Mrs. Dixon's heart, not he—only free, and natural, and high-spirited, as a young man ought to be,



and more given to liking the neighbours, and being sociable with them, than to hating everybody, and making himself hateful to them, like his father. Mrs. Ritchie knew no other fault of his. He was a handsome, free-handed young gentleman—not over-wise, perhaps, and nobody's enemy but his own. It was not easy to ascertain exactly what Mrs. Ritchie meant by the last clause in her description, and Mrs. Dixon seemed anxious to know. Well, he was not very steady, perhaps, and might be easily led, and Mrs. Ritchie thought he would be the better for a friend at his elbow. She hoped he might find good friends for the time he would have to live in those dreadful foreign parts—and once more, being complacently convinced that Mrs. Dixon would never now enjoy the opportunity of becoming acquainted with her mistress's brother, she lamented that she had not been at the Firs "in his time."

Florence did not see anything of Mr. Clint on that evening. He had been rather better during the past week, and had taken Mrs. Ritchie's communication of Miriam's request with an unusually good grace. He had been neither surprised nor concerned at the prolongation of Miriam's absence from England. It was her affair and St. Quentin's, not his; if they liked to throw away money on living uncomfortably among dirty foreigners, he did not blame them for doing so. He did not want them; there was no love lost between them. Indeed, there had been but little of that valuable but unmarketable commodity lost between Mr. Clint and any human being, in the whole course of his life.

On the morning after her arrival at the Firs, Mr. Clint sent for Mrs. Dixon. He wished to speak to her in the study. Florence had gained in good looks and health

by her sojourn abroad, and the quiet grace of her figure, and mild, pathetic beauty of her face, were set off by the plainness and propriety of her dress. As she stood just inside the study door, and Mr. Clint looked at her from his place by the writing-table before a distant window, he muttered, almost audibly: "By Jove, she looks like a lady!"

Her mental comment upon him was of a very different nature. Mr. Clint was altered since Florence had last seen him, on the day of his daughter's marriage, in a manner and to a degree which she immediately, and rightly, imputed to his growing propensity to drink. His handsomely-cut features were swollen, his eyes were glassy and unsteady, and his figure looked shrunken and stooped. He had been ill; and pain, she knew, makes terrible havoc, but Florence did not hold rheumatism accountable

for all she noticed in Reginald Clint's face and form.

He spoke to her civilly, and told her to take a seat; he wished to ask her some questions about Mrs. St. Quentin. She complied; and he asked her about Miriam's health, looks, and enjoyment of foreign travel. He spoke abruptly, but without surliness, and looked at her closely, but not offensively, as she replied.

"That will do," he said, after an interview which had lasted a quarter of an hour; "you may go. I am glad Mrs. St. Quentin sent you here. You are quite welcome to remain as long as you like. I hope they make you comfortable?"

"Thank you, sir; I am perfectly comfortable?"

"What room has Mrs. Ritchie put you in?"

"Mrs. St. Quentin's former room, sir. I have a great deal of needlework to do for

my mistress, and Mrs. Ritchie allows me the use of the sitting-room."

"All right;" and Mr. Clint dismissed her with a nod which was, for him, quite friendly.

In Miriam's former sitting-room there stood a piano. It was an old-fashioned but sweet-toned instrument, and Florence had beguiled many hours in playing upon it the music which she and Walter loved. The performer had always been supposed by the servants to be Miriam, and no remarks were made. A few days after Mrs. Dixon's arrival, Mr. Clint summoned Mrs. Ritchie to his presence, and asked her who it was whom he heard playing on the piano overhead. Mrs. Ritchie told him the performer was Dixon.

"Dixon! An accomplished lady's-maid, to be sure!"

"I shall tell her you don't wish it, sir," began Mrs. Ritchie.

"Tell her nothing of the sort. Who the devil told you I don't wish it? Why shouldn't the girl play the piano, if she chooses? Let her alone."

"Very well, sir; but you seemed to think a servant——"

"Nonsense! She may have learned music, or had it in her by nature, and be none the worse servant. There; you may go."

Mrs. Ritchie was very glad to go, and she went straight to Rose Dixon, and told her what had passed. The latter was alarmed at the possible result of her imprudence. The truth was, she had forgotten the incongruity of the exercise of such an accomplishment with the station she had assumed, and she had yielded to the strong temptation of solitude and a piano.

"He was very much surprised, as was natural; but he says you're to play as much

as you like—though it do seem like giving you leave to forget your place. It's wonderful that you can get so much good of him, I'm sure."

"I—I was not always brought up to be a servant, Mrs. Ritchie," said Florence, timidly; "at one time I hoped to be a governess, and I learned music, that I might teach it."

"Ay, indeed—that explains a many things. Well, Mrs. Dixon, if you had been in as many places as me, and seen as much of governesses, you would know that you have not lost so much as you may think. A servant's is a much easier life."

"I know that," replied Florence.

Mrs. Ritchie repeated to the satellite the explanation of Mrs. Dixon's out-of-rule conduct. Susan received it with a sniff, and remarked that "eddcation needn't have made her so uppish!"

On the following day, when Florence was

availing herself of the permission she had received, and the strains of sweet and solemn music were floating on the external air, through the open windows of Miriam's room, Reginald Clint came round the angle of the house-wall, and stood, leaning against a post in the rough railing which kept off the grazing cattle—listening.



## CHAPTER VII.

## INFLUENCE.

**T**HE one touch of humanising taste about Reginald Clint was a love of music. As a young man, he had been a not despicable performer on the violin, and had sung well. But the essential unsociability of his disposition, the moroseness which prevented his ever deriving pleasure from the sources at which other people found theirs, was stronger in him than the taste for music, and he gradually relinquished the exercise of his own talent, and the enjoyment of that of others. His wife knew nothing of music. If she had been a fine performer, and had

loved the art, he would probably have contrived to torment her through it ; as it was, he made her deficiency in that respect a constant grievance. Miriam had been taught the harp and piano, in the regular routine of "extras" at Miss Monitor's ; but music was not in her. She played from notes correctly, even expressively, but she could not converse with the taut strings, or the ivory and ebony tablets, winning them by the subtle spell of touch to be the interpreters of the desires of her heart, the yearnings of her fancy, the problems of her mind. Miriam's music was an accomplishment ; Florence's music was an inspiration. Reginald Clint had never been touched or interested by the one ; he had hardly had patience to listen to Miriam's playing, but by the other he was fairly fascinated. As he stood listening to the sounds, now solemn and mournful, anon gay and triumphant,

something long forgotten or sternly set aside in the rough selfishness and cynical unbelief of his life seemed to steal into view again, and timidly claim his attention.

“That’s real music,” he muttered; “that’s the kind of thing I used to think about, and long for, when—when there were any women about, and they were giving their feeble mimicry of it. It has been born with this girl, and not ill cultivated. Yes, that’s real music,” he repeated, as Florence dwelt upon one grand chord, and then, releasing note after note, let it pass away in a murmuring ripple of sound. She had finished for the present, and Reginald Clint, with a glance upwards at the open windows, gave himself a shake, and continued his way to the fir-wood.

That evening he sent a quantity of music to Florence, old songs and out-of-fashion compositions of Italian and English com-

posers, which he had loved in his youth. They had lain on the topmost shelf of a bookcase for years, and he had forgotten their existence. Now he had them dusted and conveyed to Mrs. Dixon, with an intimation that he hoped she would study such of them as she liked. Again Mrs. Ritchie wondered. Here was a totally unheard-of piece of politeness and attention on Mr. Clint's part, and to a servant! She was destined to a further surprise on the same subject before very long.

Mr. Martin's tolerably frequent attendance at the Firs had not been slackened of late. He could not do Mr. Clint much good; there was but one thing to be prescribed in his case with any hope of effect—abstinence from intoxicating drinks, and he knew well his patient was incorrigible on that point. But he needed such medical care as Mr.

Martin could give, exclusive of the one act of the will which lay solely within his own power, and the doctor never quite lost sight of the interests of the absent son ; never entirely ceased to hope for an opportunity of pleading his cause with effect, backed up by some favourable intelligence of his career, to be produced in evidence of his having become steady, industrious, and persevering. Mr. Clint himself had never been any of these things to a remarkable degree, but that fact by no means tempered his expectations of them from Walter, or mollified his displeasure towards him.

Mr. Martin was disappointed by Walter's silence. He had not written to his friend in that part of the world, and he thought that looked bad. He knew that he had not written to his father, but he had not expected him to do that. The doctor was aware of the terms on which Mr. Clint had given his

son the money for which he had asked. But Mrs. Ritchie had told "Mr. Walter's" friend of a letter from that dreadful foreign country which had come for Mrs. St. Quentin, and he very much wished to learn the nature of its contents. Arriving at the Firs shortly after Mrs. Dixon's return, he met Mrs. Ritchie in the hall, and she told him that Mrs. St. Quentin's maid had preceded her mistress to England, and was then at the Firs, and that she had heard about Mr. Walter, who was getting on well, and had dug a good deal of gold. With a brief expression of pleasure at the intelligence, Mr. Martin turned into the study, where he usually found his patient. Mr. Clint was there, in his accustomed place, sitting in a deep arm-chair, with his feet upon a second chair, a cigar in his mouth, and a tumbler of brandy-and-water at his elbow.

"That's bad at this hour of the day," said

the doctor, whom Mr. Clint had saluted with a curt nod.

"I daresay it is ; you've told me so often enough, but I can't help it. It is the only thing which relieves those infernal pains all over me."

"It has more to do with causing them. How are you to-day?"

"Much as usual. Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Martin took a seat, and regarded Mr. Clint with a quiet, meditative gaze.

"How's the cough?" he asked.

"Bad—constant, especially at night, and fatiguing."

"How have you been sleeping?"

"Infernally ill—walking about my room for hours sometimes, because I'm too restless to lie in bed, and falling asleep when it's time to get up."

"Just so.—You have heard from Mrs. St. Quentin?" This sudden change of topic was

as eloquent of Mr. Martin's meaning as he intended it to be ; especially as he pointed it with a significant glance at the brandy-and-water, and a deprecatory shake of the head, familiar and odious to Mr. Clint.

"Yes," replied his patient, irritably; "she has sent her maid to remain here until she comes to England, and the woman says Miriam is all right."

"I am glad to hear it. Is this maid the girl who went away with her?"

"Yes—Dixon. A very superior sort of person. You remember I told you how useful she was when I was ill in London, and she is quite an acquisition here."

"I remember. I must have a talk with her."

Then the desultory conversation took another direction, and Mr. Martin did not make any allusion to Walter. He did not like Mr. Clint's appearance, which indicated, to his



experienced eye, the imminence of another fit of illness. He left him before long, and, as usual, unattended, and found Mrs. Ritchie, also as usual, hovering about the hall.

"He isn't well, I'm afraid, sir?" she said.

"No, indeed, he is not," replied the doctor.—"Can I see Mrs. St. Quentin's maid? I should like to have a few words with her."

Mrs. Ritchie replied that she would call Mrs. Dixon down immediately—she was in the upstairs sitting-room; but Mr. Martin prevented her by going up-stairs himself instead.

Florence had been busy with the needle-work which so ably assisted her in her assumed character; and when Mr. Martin knocked at the door of her sitting-room, she was standing beside the central table, which was covered with snips of muslin and ribbon. She looked very pretty, and young, and sorrowful. He introduced him-

self, and the motive of his visit, with his customary directness, and then startled Florence by asking her abruptly if she could tell him anything about Mr. Walter Clint.

“He has written to Mrs. St. Quentin,” she replied, with a quickly beating heart.

“So I heard. Will you tell me what you know of his letters? You need not hesitate, I am an old friend of his, and quite in your mistress’s confidence.”

A whole tide of recollections swept over Florence’s mind—of the history of her husband’s boyhood, and the part which the kind doctor had played in it. How hard it was to speak with Walter’s best friend, of Walter, in the correct tone of respectful indifference! She told him as much of the history of Walter’s enterprise as she thought he would have wished her to tell, and replied to Mr. Martin’s remark, that he had surely been sufficiently successful to warrant his writing

to his father, that Mrs. St. Quentin had told her that Mr. Walter Clint had made up his mind not to communicate with Mr. Clint for another year, when he hoped to do so in the spirit of the promise he had made.

Mr. Martin was walking softly to and fro before the windows, his head bent downwards, and his hands clasped behind his back. He stopped, and looked up when she said this. "I perceive you are in Mrs. St. Quentin's confidence altogether," he said, "since you know how Mr. Clint and his son parted. I have no doubt that confidence is well placed, and that I am safe in imitating it. Walter Clint calculates, in this matter, with the cheerful confidence of a young man, and Mrs. St. Quentin has not seen her father for more than a year. I was about to write to her, when Mrs. Ritchie told me that she had, very properly, done so; and that circumstances" (he looked very

sharply at Florence here, but she bore the scrutiny calmly—the secret of Miriam’s fatal mistake was not to be surprised from her) —“unexplained circumstances have prevented her coming to England. Mrs. Ritchie believed, good woman, that Mr. Clint wished for the society of his daughter. I am convinced that, in this, she is entirely mistaken, and that in sending you, as a substitute, Mrs. St. Quentin has done a very sensible thing. Now, Mrs. Dixon—I am right in the name, I think?”

“You are right, sir.”

“I am going to speak quite plainly to you about Mr. Clint. I am very glad you are here. He likes you, and I have never known him to like any other human being. The time is coming, not slowly, when all his independence and moroseness, all his violence and suspicion, must give way, under severe bodily suffering; and then, if you have the

courage, and the charity, you may amply repay his daughter's confidence and regard by taking care of him. You have had a slight experience of him in illness—are you brave enough to venture on a prolonged experience, and of a very serious nature?”

“I am,” said Florence, with tears in her eyes. “Quite ready, for his daughter's sake. But—is he so very ill? He can go about as usual, and keeps his customary hours—at least, so far as I know.”

“Just so; but you know very little. Walter Clint must not defer the making of his peace with his father for another year, if he wishes to make it this side the grave. You may tell Mrs. St. Quentin this, and bid her communicate it to her brother. I have endeavoured to get at Mr. Clint's thoughts in reference to his son more than once lately, but I have failed. There is something in the case which I do

not understand, and yet I thought I knew it all—I saw enough of it, Heaven knows!—some new cause of bitterness in Mr. Clint's mind, which he is keeping hidden from me, and when I say that, I imply that it is hidden from everyone. Walter Clint ought to know this, and to remove it, without any more than the inevitable delay, for the time in which his father will have an opportunity of changing his mind about him, of altering any dispositions he may have made to his detriment—I *know* nothing on this point, recollect, but I have a very strong conviction—will be short.”

“Do you mean that Mr. Clint is in danger of death?”

“He is in an early stage of an incurable internal disease,” replied Mr. Martin, solemnly, “of which, I think, he is not quite unconscious, though he has never put a question to me, and it is very improbable he

would listen to me, if I told him. I hinted, some weeks ago, that it might be well to have another medical opinion ; upon which he flew into a rage, and declared, with many oaths, that no doctor but myself should ever darken his doors, and that, if I did not like the trouble of attending him, I might take myself off also. It is rather difficult to resist such an invitation, but I have resisted it for many years, and I shall resist it to the last. Tell Mrs. St. Quentin that, if you please. He may keep up, and about, and the people in the house with him may not perceive any material alteration in him for some time yet, but nothing, except the relinquishment of his habits would give him a chance for the prolongation of his life. The complete break-down may come soon and suddenly, or it may be deferred some time, for he is a strong man still—but happen it must ; and if you have come to take Mrs.

St. Quentin's place, you ought to know what that implies, and to be sure you are equal to it."

"I will obey your directions implicitly," said Florence ; "and if I can only induce Mr. Clint to allow me to attend him, I am not afraid of failing in doing so."

"A delicate young creature," thought the doctor, "for such an undertaking, but with something so steady and staid about her, too, that I daresay she will do it admirably. A great turn-up of luck for Clint, that his daughter has sent this young woman in her place ; she will be worth a dozen of Miriam. Why can't she come, I wonder? *Won't*, perhaps—or has caught an elderly Tartar."

He continued aloud : "You can write to Mrs. St. Quentin exactly what I tell you. Assure her that all in my power to do shall be done, and especially urge her to represent the condition of his father's health to



her brother; that an attempt may be made to put an end to the unnatural state of things between them."

"Is there anything I can do just now?"

"No," said Mr. Martin, "there is not. Try to ingratiate yourself with Mr. Clint, to let him get used to you. I suppose you know all his peculiarities?"

Florence replied that she did, and told Mr. Martin some particulars of Mr. Clint's illness in London.

"Just so," he said; "and next time it will be worse, and the time after worse again, and so on, until there will be no next time. I will say good-bye now, Mrs. Dixon, but I am coming to dinner to-morrow, and by that time I suppose you will have written to Mrs. St. Quentin." He left her, and as he went downstairs, he too thought, like Mr. Clint: "She looks like a lady."

Florence sat down forlornly, and covered

her face with her hands. A vision of her old home in her childhood, when she had no notion that such family disunion, misery, concealment, cross-purposes, could possibly exist—a keen, sorrowful remembrance of her dead mother, came to her. “Why were such things?” she thought. “Why was the world so dreary, which was also so fair; and life so troublesome, which had such elements of happiness in it?” And no answer came to her but tears, and the cry in her heart, “Walter! Walter!” What was she to do? That question did not long perplex her. She was to do her duty to Walter’s father and to Miriam, to watch for an opportunity of effecting a reconciliation, if possible, having previously endeavoured to procure her husband’s permission to tell Mr. Clint the whole truth.

She wrote her letters—one to Walter, one to Miriam—and walked down to the village to post them. On her return, as she was

passing the lower range of rooms, to enter the house by a side-door, she observed Mr. Clint in his accustomed place in the study-window, and saw that he was looking languid and ill. She had fulfilled her self-appointed task of aiding the housemaid to arrange his rooms in the morning, but had not seen him. Now he perceived her, and opening the long window, asked her to step into the room, as he wished to speak to her.

Mr. Clint's study communicated with the formally furnished, unused drawing-room by a folding-door, which was usually locked, and over which a curtain always hung. Florence saw that the curtain had been drawn back, and the door was standing open.

"I heard you playing on the piano upstairs," said Mr. Clint. "You play very well indeed; it is a long time since I have heard such music, indeed since I have heard any worth listening to."

“Thank you, sir,” said Florence. “Mrs. Ritchie told me you were so kind as to say you did not mind my using the piano, and that you sent me some music.”

“Will you try whether the piano in there is a good instrument, and not too hopelessly out of tune?”

Florence instantly complied. The piano was so placed that the performer was not visible from the study. She touched the keys, running over a brilliant voluntary of chords. The instrument was a good one, and in fair order. Florence told Mr. Clint that she found it so, and he desired her to go on playing. She complied, and he returned to his study. She played on and on, giving herself up to the pleasure of the music she was making, so as to be almost unconscious of the presence of the mute listening figure in the adjoining room. When she had been playing nearly half an hour, the

external door of the drawing-room opening into the hall was cautiously pushed a few inches ajar, and the face of Susan, the housemaid, appeared at it for a moment, unseen.

A brief glance sufficed to shew her Mrs. Dixon at the piano, the door of communication open, and the curtain drawn back. She could not see Mr. Clint, but she surmised that he was there, and going out by the side-door, she peeped through one of the windows of the study from the outside, and satisfied herself of the fact. Then she hastened to relate this portent to Mrs. Ritchie, who received it with provoking indifference. She had taken her cue from Miriam's letter, and her resolution from the instructions of Mr. Martin.

"You mind your own business, Susan, and leave Mrs. Dixon to mind hers," she said to the satellite. "She knows what she's about."

"I daresay she does," muttered Susan, indignant at being snubbed on Mrs. Dixon's account; "indeed I have no doubt of it. But I wonder whether Mrs. St. Quentin knows what *she* is about? I don't think she can, or she would remember there's more old fools than one in the world."

From that day forth, Florence was summoned to the drawing-room every afternoon to play on the piano for Mr. Clint's delectation. Mr. Martin was made acquainted with this newly-found resource for his patient, who required his services still more frequently as the days went by. They brought some improvement in Mr. Clint's spirits and temper; indeed all the inmates at the Firs had so much reason to congratulate themselves on the influence which Mrs. Dixon exerted, that small jealousies gave way to the strength of self-interest. But they could all see that the sullen and imperi-

ous master of the Firs was ill and suffering; they could all trace in his features, at once bloated and wasted, in the increasing shapelessness of his figure, and the listlessness which was growing upon him, until all his life became a mere desultory loitering, the slow poisoning of his besetting sin. Against that, nothing was strong; he could keep his temper under, with Mr. Martin's threat in his ears of the possible result of letting it loose; but he could not keep from drink. That demon had got hold of him securely long ago, and his gripe was not to be loosened.

Florence told Miriam all the truth. The alienated daughter learned it with a sincere and decent sorrow, but without any of the keen agony which it must have caused her had she loved her father. Miriam did not suffer distance and separation to delude her; her former home was not one whit less dis-

tasteful to her in memory than it had been in fact ; her father's character was in no degree less odious. She had only begun to doubt whether she had exchanged for the better, whether she had not accepted a more wearing slavery. In one respect she could not deceive herself—the present one was incomparably more degrading.

“I cannot come to you,” she wrote to Florence in every letter ; “he is unmanageable on that point, and I have too much at stake to take the alternative he offers me. Oh, Florence, how I hate him ! I am almost afraid to think how I hate him !”

So the time went on, and each day made Florence more useful to her husband's father, and more powerful with him. Mr. Martin told her she was like the shepherd of the tribe of Judah, who charmed the evil spirit out of King Saul.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## FROM MIRIAM TO FLORENCE.

“Hotel Bristol, Paris, May, 186—.

“MY DEAREST ROSE,—You will be very much surprised to learn that I am in Paris, but your astonishment cannot surpass mine at finding myself here. I don't think I could ever get enough of Paris ; so, of course, I am not at all sorry about the move. I will tell you the history of it all, which is simply this. We were getting on very well at Rome—a dear old place, which I liked immensely, if it were only because it is so respectable, so different from the vagabond southern cities—and I had got

into a very pleasant English set, with whom we arranged all our plans for Holy Week. I think I must have told you about them. Sir John and Lady Duffie of Duffie—Lincolnshire people; Captain and Mrs. Bainbridge; the Graydons, and others. We made a charming little coterie, and I was brushing up my music considerably, for Claude Auchinleck, Colonel Bainbridge's nephew, is *fanatico*, and we had musical parties almost every evening. He insisted on practice, too, I can tell you; and I was very glad of the opportunity. As to the place itself, it is too charming. I was so sorry I had always hated Roman history at Miss Monitor's, and thought mythology a bore; for I really felt quite ashamed of my ignorance when I found myself in the place where the heroes had had their triumphs, and the gods their votaries. But those dear *Lays* help one wonderfully, keeping

one up to who was who, and what was what; and between them and Hawthorne, I got on very well, though I often saw Claude Auchinleck pulling his moustache to hide a smile, when I made some hazardous guess or other, a couple of centuries wide of the mark or the man. I'm sure I don't know how he came to be well informed, for he is only in the army, but he *is*. Altogether, it was very pleasant, and I had quite regained my spirits—though you must not think I had ceased to be sorry for the loss of *you*—and to think there was really a change for the better in Mr. St. Quentin, that he had made up his mind to let me alone, and be rational; and I was beginning to dislike him much less, in consequence—for, you know, I am not ill-natured, and get over things easily, *some* things, at least—when everything came to an end in a sudden explosion.

“It is really so ridiculous, and at the same time so humiliating, that I can hardly tell you what happened. Mr. St. Quentin heard Claude Auchinleck say something one day about knowing the neighbourhood of the Firs very well, and then it turned out that he had been quartered at Winchester, and, having friends in our part of the country, had seen Drington and the Cookes, and visited them and a few other people living quite near the Firs. He was, I suppose, in one of his worst humours—his good ones, as I have found to my cost, are rare and superficial—for he took it into his head that Claude and I were old acquaintances, and that I had hidden the circumstance from him, pretending to have met Claude for the first time at Lady Duffle’s, in Rome. My dear, you never witnessed such an absurd scene in your life, only that it was more annoying than funny, and that I lost

my presence of mind in the first instance, through sheer amazement, and did not treat him with the contempt he merited ; I made up for that afterwards, but not effectually—one cannot try back with perfect success on a sneer ; it is weak, if not spontaneous. He made a complete and pitiable idiot of himself—openly declared his belief that I habitually deceived him about my friends and my *correspondence*—harping on the old string, you see, darling—and ended by ordering me to prepare to leave Rome instantly. We should go, he protested, and without making our destination known to anyone. What did I do ? I laughed, having shaken off my first stupor of astonishment. What did I say ? That I would not leave Rome until after Holy Week—until, indeed, all the engagements I had at present undertaken were fulfilled—for any command, threat, or entreaty that he could utter. He

uttered a good many of the first two, I can tell you ; what a fool I was to be taken in by his mild voice and courteous manners !—but my blood was thoroughly up, and he could make nothing of me. I did not condescend, just then, to give him any assurance about Claude Auchinleck ; I merely sneered and laughed, and put the thing aside, as being much too contemptible for my notice ; and then calmly told him *I would not leave Rome*. Of course he stormed, and said I must, that he would force me to do so. To this I replied that he had better not try, for that I had fully made up my mind, having endured one insult from him, to endure no more, but to return to my father's house the moment he attempted to inflict another on me. And, oh ! Rose, how I did wish I had been telling him the truth ! How I did wish I had the courage to do it ! And how much ashamed of myself I was when I knew in my inmost

heart I was telling him a falsehood, and that I should not do anything of the kind.

“ ‘I will leave the hotel,’ I said, ‘and go to every human being whom we know, intimately or slightly, in Rome, and tell them the story of your conduct. What will be thought of you, do you suppose? How will men regard the man who is avowedly terrified if his wife meets an old acquaintance, and whose mind is so evil that he constructs old acquaintances out of every stranger? Public opinion, it strikes me, will back the woman who will not submit to be accused of lying and dishonesty by a husband to whom she has always behaved well and dutifully.’ This was a complete random shot, but it hit him hard and true. He turned quite white, and when he answered me, which was not for some time, it was in a totally different tone. I was satisfied with the result, though it seemed to me odd that he should under-

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Other

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that I did believe him to be so. He is now aware that I have found him out, and I am not sure whether he cares very much ; but I am quite sure he does care very much that other people should not be enlightened also. When I saw the salutary effect produced on him by my threat, I yielded so far as to assure him that he was utterly mistaken, that I had never seen Claude Auchinleck until we met in Rome, and that I should never injure my own sense of self-respect so far as to deceive him in anything of the kind. I am perfectly certain he did not believe me, and that his suspicion remains firm and unchanged to the present moment.

“The scene ended in his giving in, so far as our stay in Rome until nearly the end of April was concerned, and by my consenting to leave Rome then. I did not much care about staying longer ; but I was not prepared for his proposing that we should go to Paris ;

I could not resist saying to him : ‘Take care ; you do not know how many old friends I may be casually introduced to in Paris. Had we not better go to Greece or Russia ?’ He took no notice of this, I must confess impertinent, speech of mine, and he has been quite civil to me ever since. I use the word civil advisedly. Don’t be *too much* shocked, dear, good, and wise little woman that you are, when I say *I am in hopes* he is leaving off caring about me. It will be such a relief if he really does leave off altogether. I shall be quite content, and he will be far happier, and everything will go on smoothly. If there be a bore which is altogether intolerable in life, it is the love of a man whom one does not love. I never understood rightly what the magnitude of the bore had been, until I found that I was ceasing to hate Mr. St. Quentin, when he left off being in love with me ; and now, I have no

doubt, we shall be quite a model couple. That he has left off, is quite certain; I am no longer told that I am beautiful, until I could almost find it in my heart to wish I could be ugly, for a change; and I am allowed to dispose much more freely of my time. I dare say Bianca, the lumpish, sulky, but not unskilful Italian girl who replaced you, dearest, as my maid, imagined herself, and was supposed by him to be an efficient spy upon my actions; but, as I had nothing to hide, she might earn her credit and her money to her heart's content, for anything I cared. The whole thing, of which he fondly believed me utterly unconscious, was merely amusing to me. I flatter myself, if I really wanted to carry out any little scheme of my own, as in the case of one you and I know of, it is not an "active and intelligent official" of Bianca's calibre who should prevent me. So I flatter myself and keep them occupied.

I hid a carefully folded note from my dress-maker in the innermost recesses of my casket the other night, having previously allowed Bianca to see me draw it, with elaborate caution and tenderness, from the folds of my *corsage*, and then I dropped the key of the casket on the carpet before I went out. I hope she brought the note to Mr. St. Q., and that he fully appreciated the value of the prize, and paid for it accordingly. How vexed you will be with me, dearest Rose, and yet I know you will laugh! I must do him the justice to say that all this nonsense has never interfered with his liberality to me. My own allowance is not half the money I have the absolute disposal of, and as I like his money, and do not like his love, it is fortunate that they are not regulated in proportion.

“Here we are, in charming rooms, and in the best situation in all Paris. I enjoy it

very much indeed, and am rather popular. Mr. St. Quentin is very good-humoured, and does not bother me. If I had you here, I should feel that my visions were being realised at last. That will come soon, I trust. If the accounts from Walter continue good, we shall soon be able to make the truth known. I am delighted, but not surprised, to hear that you are getting on well with every one at the Firs; because it is what I could never do, there is all the more reason for your doing it soon and easily. I wonder were there ever two women in this world so different as you and I? It is very sad to read your account of papa, but I am not much alarmed. It is quite wonderful how men hold out against drink—especially when they have violent tempers, and get their own way in everything. He was always very strong, but not fond of much bodily exertion; and as to the fits of

gloom you describe, he has been subject to them as long as I can remember, only he had not anyone to play and sing him out of them. He never cared a straw for my efforts in that line; and, indeed, I believe he was right, for I am no musician. We ought to have letters from Walter soon. Now that you and Mr. Martin are such good friends, you might perhaps find an opportunity of pumping him about papa's suspicions of 'Florence Reeve.' I have never forgotten Mr. St. Quentin's saying that Walter had taken some girl with him to America. I wish I might venture to bring up the subject again, but one never knows where a suspicion might arise, and it is better to be patient on the safe side, especially as there is a good chance that our patience may not be taxed much longer. I think you would find Mr. Martin could give you information of how papa came to know or suspect any-

thing, and how much he either knows or suspects. But do not try to find this out, unless you can entirely trust your nerves and your countenance, for Mr. Martin is a 'smart' man. It is not easy to deceive him. I know, because I tried it a few times in trifling matters, in boyish scrapes of Walter's, and I failed signally. He always found me out, and told me so, before I had committed myself to unlimited fibs. So be careful, dearest Rose, and don't run risks, for, mind you, I don't believe anything would induce Mr. Martin to connive at your remaining in so false a position, and he would be horribly angry with Walter.

"I hope you are diligently executing all the needlework you took home to do for your exacting and imperious mistress. I wish you could see Bianca's face sometimes, when I practise my clumsy tongue in her dialect, by dwelling on your perfections,

and by ridiculing her ideas of dressing my hair. I sometimes entertain her in this way when Mr. St. Q. thinks proper to assist at my toilet; and it is quite funny to see (in the glass) the looks she steals at him. I did this, when I was not certain whether she was in his confidence, and wanted to find out. The experiment succeeded perfectly. Dear creatures! If they only knew how easily I could hide anything I chose from their puny ingenuity, and with what ease and certainty I found *them* out, how vexed they would be! Neither of them has sufficient sense of humour to be amused, as I should be in their place, by such a discovery.

“It must be dreadfully dreary for you at the Firs, my dearest Rose; though I know you will say it is not. Why are you so even-tempered and cheerful-spirited under such circumstances as yours? Don’t imagine I am blaming you; I am only wondering at



you. Good Heavens! If, in the first place, I *could* love any man as you love Walter, separation from him would drive me wild ; and, in the second, a quiet life, *such* a quiet life, under the circumstances would make me a complete lunatic. Graceless as I am, I can *admire you*, and, and—no ; I was going to say what is not true, that I can wish to imitate you. I cannot—I do not feel the desire to be what you are—I am of the earth, earthy—of the world, worldly ; and you have a considerable dash of the heavenly in your composition. I do believe I am more worldly since you left me ; that I love money, and fine clothes, good living, jewels, horses, all kinds of show and excitement, much more than when we were together. That is certainly a testimony to *you*, if it is a bad sign in your most affectionate sister,

“ MIRIAM ST. QUENTIN.”

"P.S.—This ought to have been posted three days ago, but was neglected. Things are not quite so comfortable. I danced three times with a certain Count Scalchi at the De Mouchy's on Tuesday, and met him at dinner next day, when he made himself agreeable. Mr. St. Quentin is watching *him* now, and I do verily believe *he* believes the man followed me hither from Rome. It is like nothing that ever happened, except the plots of the Spanish romances, and the plays of the Restoration, and, after all, they did not happen! Fortunately, he cannot make me unhappy, but he may make me ridiculous, by making himself so. I wonder is he a little 'cracked?' He positively looks quite thin and yellow, and ever so much older than he used to look. I should not be surprised if he would not remain in Paris now, if this craze lasts. What dreadful inconstancy he must suspect me of! Not to

*him, cela va sans dire*, but to Claude Auchinleck, and the mysterious gentleman who preceded him in my light affections, for whose effusions he would persist in mistaking poor Walter's letters. He never got the better of me on *that* point. By-the-bye, do you remember wanting me to show him one sheet of a letter from Walter, a safe sheet, in which you were not mentioned (it was almost all about his friend, Mr. Daly), in order to convince him that it really did come from Walter, and I would not? I never did, and I never will. If he persists in this present fit of absurdity, and makes any move, I am determined it shall be to England—and I shall carry my point, if I have to do it by threatening to *run away with Scalchi*, who would be exceedingly unlikely to consent to the arrangement."

Florence read this letter from Miriam

with many contending feelings. The affection for herself which it expressed touched her deeply, but the picture it contained of Miriam's life, and her feelings, alarmed her. She could not help being amused by it, but at the same time she was heartily grieved. She did not believe that Miriam felt Mr. St. Quentin's distrustful and insulting jealousy so little as she pretended to feel it—pretended, not only to Florence, but to herself. She had a proud nature, and would wince under the insult of suspicion, however she might scorn the person who suspected her. And her strong sense and wholly unsentimental turn of mind would render a weakness, even if amiable, intolerable to her. How much more a weakness that was anything but amiable, and exceedingly insulting!

“Her life is much drearier than mine, in reality,” thought Florence, “and has more

real danger in it. I do not know from whence the temptation will come, or in what shape, but I am terribly afraid for Miriam."

## CHAPTER IX.

## FROM FLORENCE TO MIRIAM.

“The First, May, 186—.

“MY DEAREST MIRIAM,—Your letter has surprised me very much. I suppose I must not venture to tell you what else it has done; but I think you can hardly have expected it to leave my mind as easy as it found it. I cannot help thinking you are persuading, or forcing, yourself into that sort of hard frivolity—I don't know any other name for it—which is in reality not a bit like you. You cannot make me believe that you are really satisfied to think yourself less dear to your husband than you

were ; if it were only for your pride's sake, I am sure you would not welcome such a conviction. The mere notion of its being the case is indeed absurd. A man so entirely devoted to you, to be changed, rendered indifferent, by a ridiculous notion, quite as humiliating to himself as to you. You will laugh, and say how like me it is to be impressed in the first place by the sentimental aspect of the circumstances related in your letter. The sentimental aspect of a relation which must last all one's life, and is the most important in life, always seems to be worthy of attention ; for, after all, a good deal of us is sentiment, you know, and cannot be got rid of. I cannot think it, and I am sure it is only a result of the queer notion Mr. St. Quentin has taken into his head. I have always heard and read that jealousy is the most unaccountable of all passions, and I can easily imagine its

prompting a man to a kind of reprisals—the ‘if you don’t care for me, I don’t care for you,’ kind of thing. But, rely on it, your power over your husband’s feelings is really unshaken, and, if you would only use it wisely, you would both be happy. I do not mean by that a ‘model couple’ in your sense. I pity him very much, I must say: there is something in my own heart, happily for me, never yet roused, which fills me with compassion for jealous people; they must be so miserable; and I never could blame Mr. St. Quentin for disliking me. You ought to be able to pity him. He can’t help it, I suppose, and perhaps he may consider that a kind of side-winded compliment.

“I cannot tell you the pleasure with which I learned that you are in Paris. It is such a relief to know that you are so near, to know that you *could* come, if it



were necessary, at something less than the cost in fatigue and inconvenience of a journey from Rome ; for I must tell you, before I go on to other subjects, that I don't agree with you that there is nothing to be immediately alarmed about in your father's state of health. You can have no idea of the panic I get into sometimes lest he should die without being reconciled to Walter, without seeing him, without learning the truth from his son. There is nothing so dreadful as death, when an unreconciled quarrel remains ; and I am sure Walter, little as he thinks so now, would feel it dreadfully. Besides, he is, though not wholly, yet gravely, in the wrong. I feel that more and more deeply every day, and not all that my utmost efforts can accomplish can ever atone for the deception which Walter has practised on his father. I don't mean in my being here—that is quite a

secondary matter ; the original deception of our marriage is what I mean ; and far above my own loneliness without him, my solicitude about him, and longing for his return, is the desire I feel that he and his father should not part for ever estranged. I pray more earnestly for that than I ever prayed for anything in my life. I see a good deal of Mr. Clint now, every day, and I watch closely for any indication that he is thinking of Walter, or is softening towards him. I have not found any, with all my watching ; but perhaps he is on his guard, being suspicious of me. I think he is a man who would resent its being surmised that he had changed his mind, and, of course, he cannot doubt but that I would tell you anything I could find out.

“ Indeed, dear Miriam, he is failing. Mr. Martin is, I am convinced, aware that his state is precarious, although he still persists

in going about, and there is no apparent alteration in his ways, or in the ways of the house. What you say about his being a strong man, and resisting his terrible habit for a long time, is true ; but I am not sure that the break-down is not all the more complete and hopeless when it comes. I have had much less difficulty than I could have anticipated in getting into the position I hoped for here. The servants don't like me, of course—it is not to be expected that they should—but then they dislike and fear him so much, that they are quite satisfied with any arrangement, however it may savour of favouritism, which removes in some degree the task of waiting upon him off them, and puts it on me. The last time he was confined to the house for three days—of course, after a bout of solitary drinking, which he said was gout—I answered his bell, as if by accident, and told Mrs. Ritchie I

thought there was no other servant about ; and that I had no objection to do so habitually, when I was in your room, and therefore close to his. The result is, I attend on him constantly, and since then he has been better, and I have been requested to resume my piano-playing in the evenings—which puzzles the servants, I can see ; but Mrs. Ritchie condescends to approve, and that is all the backing I require. He is more morose than ever. Mr. and Mrs. Cooke have honestly kept the promise they made you, and called on him several times ; but he invariably refuses to see them, on the plea that he is not well, and he sees literally no one but Mr. Martin and Mr. Standish.

“ I met Mrs. Cooke in the village one day last week, as I was turning away from the post-office after posting a letter to Walter, and she stopped to speak to me. You have always told me she is a very nice woman,

and I trust your judgment and your taste implicitly ; but I must confess *I* do not like her. There are times when not all the effort I can make enables me to retain the mental attitude of my position towards others, and I am quite conscious that, in judging Mrs. Cooke, I did not distinctly remember that I was Mrs. St. Quentin's maid, being spoken to by the wife of the rector of the parish, and I made her short and indifferent answers. I did not think her manner pleasant, and the way in which she looked at me was decidedly not so—it was almost suspicious, and, if I might say so, impertinent. She was curious to know whether your father corresponded directly with you, and quite unnecessarily emphatic in expressing her opinion that Mrs. St. Quentin ought to be informed of the extreme seclusion in which her father lived, and how very undesirable his friends considered it. Bless the

woman ! One would have thought, to hear her, that I was keeping your father shut up for some purpose of my own, and that she wanted to make me understand that I was found out. At all events, she did not impress me agreeably, and I gave her no information, and, I suspect, as little satisfaction.

“ My life is very monotonous, but I like it, like it better than any other kind of life, while Walter is absent ; and I know I am useful to your father. I think, sometimes, he drinks less, has less time, in fact, in which to drink. He is never violent with me, but sometimes doggedly sullen, so that I know not whether I have offended him, or what is the matter with him. His looks are very much changed. Dear Miriam, I am a bad hand at description, but I must tell you that his hair is thinner and more gray, and it looks lank and damp. His face is red, and yet pale ; there is a livid hue about it very often,

like a thin ashy shade over the blood-red flesh ; and his lips are loose, blue, and seldom quite still. He never walks without his stick now, he leans heavily on it, but with an unsteady hand, the veins and fingers of which are thickened and coarse. His eyes are sometimes bloodshot, and generally dim, except when he is angry about anything, then they can glare still ; and his voice is uncertain and weaker. When he is shaking off the effect of a real fit of drinking, he is as hoarse as a raven. He takes some pains to conceal the quantity he drinks. He keeps the key of the wine-cellar as religiously as usual, and puts in the empty bottles out of sight as far as he can. Mr. Martin says he never knew the desire for concealment, which he calls 'a remnant of decency,' to last so long, in the case of a man addicted to this vice, and he instructs me to let him suppose me to be ignorant of the truth as

long as possible. I shall be all the more useful to him, Mr. Martin says, when concealment ceases to be practicable, if he can, up to that time, preserve the figment of self-respect; and besides this, there is a kind of restraint in it—it is not much, but it is something.

“He had a dreadful attack last week, but I did not see him in it. No one did, except Mr. Martin and Robert. It did not last long; and Mr. Martin said it would have frightened me uselessly, and probably led, had Mr. Clint discovered my knowledge of it, to his dismissing me from the house. Fancy if Mr. Martin could have surmised the weight and meaning of such a probability to me! He was in abject fear, they told me, they could not make out of what, and he clung to them, trembling, with the most heartrending entreaties that they would not leave him, until they succeeded in stupefying



him. Then, the waking! the appalling lassitude and misery, and the manifest decrease of strength since the attack. Miriam, I feel convinced he is dying, not by such slow degrees as Mr. Martin prepared me for at all, and that there is nothing to hope for except a briefer period of a less kind of suffering.

“I considered all you said to me maturely, and being quite satisfied that I might safely trust my nerves and my countenance, I endeavoured to find out whether Mr. Martin knew anything of the object of your father’s inquiries at Tredegar Terrace.

“I told him my mistress had avowed to me that she feared something had occurred still further to embitter the mutual feelings of her father and her brother, but that, unless Mr. Martin was aware of the circumstance, she had no means of ascertaining whether her conjecture was correct. Mr. Martin replied—

“ ‘I suppose I may tell you anything which I would tell Mrs. St. Quentin?’

“ ‘I am entirely in her confidence in this matter,’ I said.

“ ‘Well, then,’ continued Mr. Martin, ‘she had better know the truth. Mr. Clint has told me all about it. His son—such a nice fellow, Mrs. Dixon; if he had only a little more sense, and a little less complaisance—fell in love with the daughter of the person in whose house he lodged in London; and after her mother’s death, this young lady went out as governess to some family which she left under peculiar circumstances. I never believe one woman’s account of another, as I told Mr. Clint, when he told me that the woman whose brats the poor girl taught said she was ‘indeed a dangerous inmate;’ which meant, no doubt, that Miss Reeve was an attractive creature, and the lady herself, a Mrs. Clewer, was an

elderly catamaran ; and I daresay Miss Reeve was all right. The thing came to Mr. Clint's knowledge in an odd sort of way. A letter addressed in a common hand, like a shop-man's or a servant's, was sent to the Firs, directed to W. Clint, Esq., and opened by Mr. Clint ; it contained a letter, written, in the most lover-like terms, to Miss Reeve' (Miriam, I did keep my countenance, I assure you I did), signed with Walter's name, and addressed to Miss Reeve, at Mrs. Clewer's. There was a second letter, from that no doubt estimable person, in which she informed the poor girl that the letter had been found at the back of a drawer in the room formerly occupied by her, and that she, Mrs. Clewer, in restoring it to her, felt it her duty, as a mother and a decided Christian, to point out to her the error of her ways, and to inform her that it would be out of her power, should she ever apply to her for

a recommendation, to give her one. The lady added that she presumed the best way to make sure of the letter reaching its owner, and to make her aware that she was detected, was to send it to the deluded young man whom she had evidently led astray from the paths of duty and wisdom. Accordingly, Mrs. Clewer had forwarded the whole budget to Mr. Walter Clint, at his lodgings at Tredegar Terrace ; and the servant there, who, it seems, knew his father's address, but had lost sight of him for some time, redirected the letter to the Firs. Mr. Clint immediately wrote to Mrs. Clewer for information respecting Miss Reeve, and received in return one of those exquisitely malicious, piously foreboding, effusively vague letters characteristic of women of a certain class of mind, when they are puffed up with the fond notion of being of some importance, and see their way to a safe indulgence in spite. This

occurred some time before Miss Clint's marriage; and Mr. Clint went up to London with his mind full of it, and returned brooding over it, I am convinced, together with all the rest of Walter's misdemeanours, real and imaginary. It is only within the last week he has told me about it.'

" 'And what did you say?' I contrived to stammer out.

" 'That it was all rubbish; that Walter had naturally, and no doubt honourably, admired a pretty girl, whom he had met under very provocative circumstances; and that Mrs. Clewer was an unamiable, spiteful woman, whose ostentatious ignorance of 'what had become of Miss Reeve,' was the exact result of her own conduct to her—depend on it, the woman who wrote that letter after she had left her, treated her ill while she stayed—and that it was a boyish folly, without anything disgraceful in it.

He had an absurd notion that Walter might have married this poor girl, but I reasoned him out of that.'

" 'How did you manage that, sir?' I asked.

" 'Well, indeed, without much difficulty. I had only to represent to him that no one knew what Walter's circumstances were better than he did ; he was perfectly aware that he had not given his son the means of keeping a wife, and that, as a fact, his son had no wife, but had gone out with a male companion to the gold-diggings. I think no argument could be simpler or more conclusive than *that*?' "

" I assented. Dearest Miriam, imagine how I was longing to get away from him ! 'You may tell Mrs. St. Quentin all this, as, I suppose, she knows what I said on your arrival ; and tell her she need not be uneasy ; there is absolutely nothing in it.' "

“Imagine my reflections, though I cannot be identified with this calumniated Florence Reeve! Conceive what Walter would feel if he knew of Mrs. Clewer’s letter! Do you wonder that I sometimes feel the restraining bands of time and space almost insufferable, as if I must, by a mighty effort of my spirit, burst them, and be free—free to join him, to see him! But weary weeks and months must wear themselves away before the seal is taken off my lips.

“You draw a picture of me, dearest Miriam, as much too flattering as your picture of yourself is false to the reality. I did laugh, I confess, at your story about the note from the dressmaker; but would it not be better to face this craze of Mr. St. Quentin’s openly, and thus shame him, or reason him out of it? Of course you are very careful to give evil tongues no chance of maligning you. If he is known to be a

jealous man, your conduct will be very closely scrutinized. It seems to me that I have grown wonderfully wise of late. Lawrence Daly used to say that nothing would ever teach me the ways of the world; but I am learning them—that letter of Mrs. Clewer's was a whole class-book to me.

“I shall be anxious till I hear from you again. Don't vex Mr. St. Quentin *too much* about Count Scalchi. I wish he would come to England, buy the ‘place’ he talked about when he first came, and that you would ‘settle down.’ I know you cannot bear *the word*, but I have a notion, dear Miriam, after all the knocking about you have had, you would find *the thing* very tolerable. I have no home news for you. The place looks neglected and melancholy. Your father, though he goes out every day that he is up, in all weathers, hardly ever enters the garden, and seems to care nothing



about it. The path on the border of the fir plantation is his invariable promenade; there he walks, slowly and alone, by the hour together. If he would read, it would be a resource for him, but he never reads, not even the newspaper, I think. I must conclude now. Write soon again.

“Your affectionate sister,

“FLORENCE CLINT.”

While Florence was occupied in writing this letter, Mr. Clint was walking, in the listless, depressed, desultory way which had become habitual to him, up and down the path on the edge of the fir-wood. He looked ill, feeble, and angry. Muttered exclamations of impatience escaped him from time to time, and he shook his stout stick with something of the gesture which, a couple of years before, made a stick, in the hand of Reginald Clint when he was in a

passion, an unpleasantly suggestive weapon.

“What the devil is keeping the man?” he would mutter. “Not business—he cannot put *me* off on that pretence.”

Presently the individual he was by this time wildly objurgating, appeared. Robert was conducting him towards the fir-wood, when Mr. Clint stood still, and shouted at them :

“That will do, you fool. Do you suppose he does not know a road when it lies before him, or me when he sees me? Go back, and mind your business.—Soh! you’ve come at last, Standish, have you? I have expected you this hour.”

“I could not come sooner,” replied Mr. Standish—a tall, thin, self-possessed man, who took Mr. Clint’s impatient spleen very quietly—as he joined him. “Do you mean to discuss the important business, on which you tell me you wish to consult me, here?”

"I do," replied Mr. Clint, shortly. "Just give me your arm, will you?"

The other presented his arm, without much alacrity; and Mr. Clint, shifting his stick to the left hand, leaned closely upon it, as he turned into the walk, and pursued it in the direction leading away from the house, talking low and earnestly to his companion. That gentleman did not pay any remarkable attention to his words at first, but after awhile he began to listen with marked, even startled interest, and, with bent brows and keenly searching eyes, to question the speaker closely.

Mr. Standish was a lawyer.

## CHAPTER X.

## FRIENDLY OFFICES.

LIFE within the gates at the Firs went on very quietly, to outward appearance, and was so full of anxiety to Florence that her mind, with the one great exception of its straying over the sea to Walter, was concentrated upon it. She knew nothing; she cared nothing about what went on without. But the moroseness and the exclusiveness of Reginald Clint had not banished the influence of gossip among the inmates of his house and their village acquaintances. They had, perhaps, rather intensified the need for the loosing of tongues in every

direction in which either information or surmise could be distributed ; and the master of the Firs would have been astonished if he could have known how much people who, he would have positively declared, knew nothing at all about him, contrived to say.

That Mr. Clint was a bad father, had been a bad husband, and was not likely ever to be anything but a bad man, were facts so well known and frequently discussed in the neighbourhood that they had quite lost the charm of novelty ; but an entirely fresh impetus had been given of late to the gossip of the place, and its motive power was poor unconscious Florence. She went on her way, fulfilling her appointed task, which was becoming day by day more difficult and painful, and she was furnishing an inexhaustible theme of surmise, suspicion, and detraction to a number of people of whose existence she was hardly aware.

The falseness of her position, though, in one of its aspects, never absent from her mind, in others never occurred to Florence. So intent was she upon the one purpose of her life that she did not perceive the surrounding facts and impressions, and she failed to remark the manifest silence and restraint of the servants towards her, because they were just what she wished for, and by freeing her from a constant necessity for acting, left her all the more time for thought, and the furtherance of her project. She did once or twice notice that Mrs. Ritchie spoke sharply to her, and that she was never asked to join her on any of the occasions which had been impossible to avoid, and which had taxed her gentle patience so severely; but she merely observed these facts, they made no impression on her.

In the meantime, a very pretty little commotion was in progress in the village, and

even for some distance outside it, and before very long Mr. Martin became aware of it, and of its origin. The indignant public had convinced itself that Mr. Clint, for whom no esteem or compassion had ever been felt, was in danger of falling "a victim to the arts and fascinations of his daughter's confidential maid," and that Mrs. St. Quentin, owing to her injudicious selection of a young and pretty woman to fill the place she herself ought to have occupied, was not unlikely to find herself accommodated with a step-mother. It was just the sort of thing a man like Mr. Clint, excluded himself from society, would be likely to do; in short, there were many people who asked, with Susan, whether Mrs. St. Quentin thought there was only one old fool in the world, when she had made sure of her husband? This question had suggested itself, in the first instance, through the instrumentality of

Susan, who, without feeling any positive dislike of Mrs. Dixon, had an uneasy jealousy and suspicion of her, which, of course, originated in her unacknowledged intuitive consciousness of that young person's superiority. She had no deliberate intention of slander, or even of ill-nature, in the first whispers which she set abroad, subsequent to her discovery of Mrs. Dixon at the piano in the drawing-room ; but the suggestion that Mrs. St. Quentin's maid was " playing a nice little game of her own," found such popular favour that Susan could by no means resist multiplying her observations, and detailing their results with considerable exaggeration.

The perfect quiet of life at the Firs, and the seclusion of it, were dangerous in the sense that they threw Florence off her guard, that she appeared, as she was, a refined and high-minded young lady, and by degrees ceased to remember the technicalities to



which she had trained herself for the maintenance of her assumed 'position. This told seriously in support of the theory of her designs upon Mr. Clint; for whereas she was unconsciously resuming the externals of her real station, she was supposed to be practising for the station to which she nefariously aspired.

It would be difficult, in any case, to trace the progress of a rumour originating in one class of society, to the knowledge of another, and its adoption by that other. In this particular instance it would be impossible. Mrs. Cooke tried to trace it, but she failed, it had passed through so many channels before it reached her through the medium of the village school-mistress, a few days before that on which she had met Florence in the village, and produced so unpleasing an effect on her. Circumstances were against Florence, it must be confessed, since the way of

the world is to take a bad motive for granted, but never to recognise a generous one, except under the pressure of overwhelming proof; and Mrs. Cooke, a sensible woman, and not in the least ill-natured, felt some concern for her friend Miriam. There was another point to view, to be sure—whether any woman, with a good character and a decent education, would not be so much too good for Mr. Clint as to be fairly held to have purchased the worldly advantages involved in becoming his wife at a very high price indeed; but Mrs. Cooke could hardly be expected to consider the matter in that aspect. Class prejudices have such tremendous power over women that it would be almost impossible, to the most reasonable among them, to discern that marrying a “gentleman” might be not only a condescension and a sacrifice, but an actual degradation, on the part of a “servant.”

As it was, Mrs. Cooke felt much indignation with Mrs. Dixon, contempt for Mr. Clint, compassion for Miriam, and indecision as regarded herself. She had forgotten her husband's intuitive incredulity about Miriam's intention of accepting Mr. St. Quentin, or she might have been prepared for his reception of the exciting item of village gossip which she now retailed to him. He merely remarked that it would be a great pity any decent woman should become the wife of such a man, but that he supposed the poor girl wished, like her mistress, to "better herself."

"Like Miriam!" exclaimed Mrs. Cooke, aghast at the comparison. "What *can* you mean?"

"How *can* you ask? Miriam Clint married an old man to *better herself*—it is the word that shocks you, my dear, not the fact; and this young woman may, perhaps,

if this story you have heard of her anomalous position at the Firs be the truth, be scheming, without assistance, to do what Miriam was backed up in doing by everyone."

"But, my dear John, think of the difference—think of her position!"

"But, my dear Fanny, think of his age, his character, and his habits!"

"It is impossible you could approve!" said Mrs. Cooke, rather bewildered.

"I certainly do not approve; but, supposing this gossiping story to have any foundation, which I do not believe, you should bear in mind that vulgar but veracious proverb, that 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.'"

The immediate result of this conversation was a letter from Mrs. Cooke to Miriam, which sufficiently accounted for the impression produced on Florence by her interview

with that lady. She had indeed been regarded with suspicion, and purposely reminded of her station. "It is the most exquisitely funny complication," wrote Miriam to poor Florence, "that ever occurred. I am so possessed with the comicality of the idea that I can hardly take a serious view of the inconvenience it might have led to, if we had found it out sooner, when the time which will set it all to rights was farther away. I laughed until I nearly cried over her letter; and Mr. St. Quentin had one of his most severe fits of curiosity about it, but I need hardly say he did not get the slightest satisfaction. My dear, romantic, sentimental, devoted Rose, to think of you being solemnly and circumstantially accused of scheming to make papa marry you! Undue influence, indeed! 'Oh, Sir Pitt! Sir Pitt! I—I am married already!'—only it is Amelia who is in the scrape, and not Becky. I

cannot fancy anything more amusing : and how like the people at Drington to get up such a story ! Just think of all your care and kindness being thus interpreted ! Of course it is not worth being annoyed about for one moment, and it will certainly increase the piquancy of the ' situation,' when the truth comes out. There is no chance, I had almost said no hope, of its coming to papa's ears—no one ventures to talk gossip to him—but, if it only could, just imagine the rage he would be in ! I am sure it would be quite a revelation to him that anyone had ever dared talk of *him* and his affairs ; and I could find it in my heart to wish, for once, to see him in one of his very finest frenzies. I flatter myself I have answered Fanny Cooke's letter with admirable discretion. She most sincerely believed she was doing her duty in writing to me. I fully recognized her zeal and fidelity, and

then went on to say that I was about to repose a confidence in her which would at once convince her that the rumour she had heard was utterly unfounded, and relieve her from anxiety on my account. I told her that my confidential maid had a prior attachment of long standing, to a young man with whose merits and fidelity to her I was intimately acquainted—that the engagement had already subsisted some years, and that Mrs. Dixon had entered my service, and subsequently assumed her present responsible task, in consequence of this estimable young man's absence in a foreign country, from which he hoped to return sufficiently well-off to enable him to put an end to their separation—that Mrs. Dixon's attendance on my father was an immeasurable boon to me, and that I most earnestly hoped no ill-natured gossip might ever come to her ears, rendering it impos-

sible for her to continue to do me this great service. Admire, I beg, my dear, the ingenuity with which I have told nothing but the truth, and yet completely routed Fanny's suspicions ! You *have* a prior attachment, you *have* been engaged to Walter for some years, and he *does* hope to put an end to your separation. Depend upon it, Fanny will be very kind to you in future, and will put down the village gossip with a high hand. We may safely trust her for that. I was so much amused at the whole business, and so pre-occupied with my letter to her, that I have no doubt Mr. St. Quentin is convinced I am 'carrying on' some deep-laid scheme."

It would be difficult to describe the feelings with which Florence read this letter. They amounted to positive horror, and included some of the very keenest suffering through which she had ever passed. The



shock of the discovery that she was suspected of a design, which not all the force of her reasoning upon the absolute ignorance of her true history by all around could cause her to think of without a horrible sense of its outrageous nature, was much increased by Miriam's mode of treating it. There was something so keenly hurtful to her delicacy, to her feelings of every kind, in this cruel rumour, and Miriam could regard it only in the light of a joke! She felt as if she must needs sink under this trial, as if it were quite too much for her, the filling up of her cup with a draught too nauseous to be drunk. She shut herself up in her room, and wept the bitterest tears that had ever fallen from her eyes, tears which had an unreasonable kind of humiliation in them. She could not possibly bear this, she thought, and yet, what could she do? To go away would be to lose all she had

striven so hard for; and yet, to remain under such a suspicion, watched by the servants, every action imputed to a motive which she shuddered to think of, notwithstanding its absurd impossibility—could she do that? She was turning these things in her mind, and was feeling quite sick with crying, when she was told that Mr. Martin wished to see her. She went downstairs quickly, without giving a thought to her red and swollen eyelids and pale cheeks.

Mr. Martin glanced sharply at her, as she entered the study, where he was alone. Mr. Clint had not yet risen. The doctor had had a hint from Mrs. Dixon, on the previous evening, that he was in one of his very bad fits. These had recurred of late more frequently, and he now made few attempts at concealment, and no efforts at all at self-control.

“H—m,” said Mr. Martin, audibly; add-

ing, in his thoughts : "she has heard it, and has been crying her pretty eyes out."

He asked her a few questions about his patient, and then said :

"I have not met many sensible women in my life, but you are one of the most sensible women I have met. Now, I am going to speak plainly to you. Some foolish people here have been telling lies about you, prompted by idleness and ignorance, and in some degree by jealousy."

Florence sobbed.

"You have heard this, and you were in doubt about what you ought to do. I am right, am I not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, this is what you ought to do. You are of incalculable value here, you are doing your duty admirably, and no reasonable person who has ever spoken ten words to you could believe one word of this non-

sense. If you allow it to influence you, you will be very unkind to Mrs. St. Quentin, and very cruel to this unhappy man, who has nothing but increased suffering before him. I took it for granted you would act consistently with your character, before I said anything to you ; and I have effectually prevented your being annoyed, by informing Mrs. Ritchie that the gossip had come to my ears, and that if it reached Mr. Clint's ever so faintly, it would cost all the servants at the Firs their places. I believe they are thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and that you will have no annoyance whatever. You will promise me to think no more about it ?”

“ I will try,” said Florence, simply.

“ That's right. I will go and see Mr. Clint in his room ; I cannot wait for him any longer.”

Mr. Martin came out from that visit to his patient looking very serious. Their

interview had been long and unpleasant. The doctor had never told Reginald Clint before, in so many words, that he was drinking himself to death, surely, and now by no means slowly. He had told him so on this occasion, and in the plainest and most emphatic terms depicted the sufferings to which he would inevitably subject himself. The man's appearance was more ghastly on this occasion than he had ever seen it. A fixed yellow hue pervaded his skin, and hard red blotches marked his sunken cheeks. He had made an attempt to dress himself, but had been too sick and giddy to succeed, and Mr. Martin found him lying on his bed in his shirt and trousers, exhausted, feverish, and in one of his most sullen and dangerous moods. But he had to deal with the only person who had never been afraid of him.

"I suppose you mean that I can't recover, in any case?" asked Mr. Clint, with a

fierce glance at Mr. Martin, instantly turning away."

"I do mean just that ; but your life might be greatly prolonged, and your pain much alleviated, if you would use the reason which you still retain, and give up drink. If you would even moderate your indulgence in it, it would make a great difference to you during the remainder of your life.

Reginald Clint raised himself up, hitched his back against the bed, and turned towards Mr. Martin, gripping the bed-clothes in his coarse, bony, yellow hand. His voice was hoarse, partly from illness, but still more from passion, as he said, scowling the while as few but he could scowl :

"What is it that possesses you to talk such cursed nonsense to me? You know me long enough and well enough to know the folly of it. Give up drink ! Do you know what drink has been to me?"

"I think I do. The destruction of your body and mind."

"Don't trouble yourself about my mind, that's not your business. It has served my turn, and it will serve it yet. You can't make me out a madman, you know."

"Not *yet*, perhaps," said Mr. Martin, with grave and deliberate emphasis; "but you are coming to that. You certainly will come to it, if you have a few more such fits as this has been."

"So that I shall not be able to arrange my affairs, eh?—and your worthy favourite, my good and dutiful son, who has not sent me a line for nearly two years, will come in for my property, without any trouble. Is *that* your meaning?"

"Not exactly. You are a long way off the state of mind in which a man ceases to be competent to make an unjust will. The power to do wrong lasts long, unhappily.

But you are day by day destroying your judgment, deadening your conscience, and reducing yourself to a lower level of intelligence."

"Hah! Well, as you are concerned only with my body, let me tell you, once for all, and pray remember it practically, for you will be spared a deal of talk, and I a deal of listening; *I will not* give up drink, and I will not drink less, so long as I feel disposed to drink as much. There is nothing else I care for; there's no man, woman, child, animal, or thing of value to me, in comparison with drink—or, indeed, of any value at all, and life without drink would be a rotten bargain. You won't get me to make it."

"Good-bye," said Mr. Martin, abruptly, and he turned towards the door, without the least effort to disguise his disgust.

Late in the evening, Mr. Martin received a note from Mrs. Dixon. She was directed



by Mr. Clint to request that Mr. Martin would come to the Firs at twelve o'clock on the following day without fail. She added a few words on her own account, to the effect that Mr. Clint had been very ill all day, and had eaten nothing.

“At noon, the next day, Mr. Martin presented himself at the Firs. He found Mr. Clint in his study, seated at his writing-table, on which lay a large folio of foolscap, covered with writing in law hand. Mr. Standish was in the room, and he bowed, without speaking, to Mr. Martin, who was surprised by a certain formality in the appearance of both gentlemen.

“How do you do, Martin?” said Reginald Clint, looking up at him with a queer expression. “I am all right, you see, and have sent for you quite in a friendly way. None of your d—d doctoring to-day. I’ve taken your advice, though, in one respect, if

I've neglected your physic; in fact, I had had the same bright idea myself, and I have sent for you to ask you to witness my will."

Mr. Martin looked incredulous and uncomfortable. Mr. Standish spoke.

"Yes, Mr. Martin; this is Mr. Clint's will, for which he favoured me with instructions some little time ago. He particularly wishes for your signature as one of the witnesses."

"If any other friend——" Mr. Martin began, but Mr. Clint interrupted him.

"D—n it, man, don't you know I haven't a friend in the world but yourself? What objection can you have?"

"I have none," said Mr. Martin, with a mental calculation of the use of codicils, in case he should find out that Walter was ill-treated by this document, and gain the chance of influence by his complaisance.

"Why couldn't you say so at first, then?"

Now for the other witness. Mrs. Ritchie will do."

"Hadn't you better employ Mrs. Dixon, if you don't want this talked about?" suggested Mr. Martin.

"Mrs. Dixon. No—I—I think not," answered Mr. Clint. His tone was embarrassed, and a quick glance passed between him and the lawyer, who slightly shook his head. "I prefer to employ Mrs. Ritchie."

"As you choose," said Mr. Martin.

The bell was rung, and there was an embarrassed pause. Mrs. Ritchie came, and had the service which was required of her elaborately explained. She complied with her master's request, with that amusing mixture of pride with apprehension of mysterious consequences, peculiar to persons of her class who are called upon to "sign" anything, and in a few minutes the proceed-

ings were completed. Then Mr. Martin went away at once on the plea of business, leaving the lawyer and his client together.

## CHAPTER XI.

“WHERE IS WALTER?”

WITH the certainty that under any circumstances his life could not be much prolonged, it might have been supposed that some soft, regretful feeling would have come to Reginald Clint. He might have been less morose and cynical, less obstinate in his conviction that, in the long-standing quarrel between himself and his fellows, he only was in the right, they absolutely and wilfully in the wrong. But, if any observer had indulged such an expectation, it would have arisen from an imperfect conception of the man's character. We are

too apt to regard sickness and sorrow as direct agents for good in themselves, whereas they never absolutely turn aside the ordinary current of one's moral life ; they are what the person who experiences them makes them. Reginald Clint believed what Mr. Martin had told him ; indeed, there was a warning voice within him heard, but in the sense of warning unheeded, which affirmed the truth of the doctor's words. Nobody but himself could tell how difficult he—who, until a comparatively late period, had been a strong man—sometimes found it to live ; how easy it would have seemed to him to relinquish the effort, and allow that deadly nausea, that terrible tremulousness, that overwhelming weakness to have their full way. And they wanted him to give up drink ; to give up the only thing that checked all these, and pulled him back from the abyss he so constantly neared !

He was not such a fool as not to know that it was also the origin of the deadly evil which he felt within his frame, but it was too late now ; he did not deceive himself ; he knew it would always have been too late, at least ever since the time when, if an intrusive vision of his wife's pale face, as he remembered it in her welcome coffin, and his wife's rosy face, as he could not forget it, on her wedding-day, arose before him, he got rid of them both by the agency of drink. He would keep off the big bouts which shook his nerves, and inflicted those dreadful attacks of fear upon him, but he would do no more ; and he was not afraid of death. There might be another life, perhaps ; he did not know or care much about that ; Reginald Clint had not in him even "the *beginning* of wisdom ;" at all events, he was getting tired of this present world. People died very easily sometimes, with the

aid of drink, and he did not like pain. He had had a good deal of it already, more than anyone knew about; he wanted to have as little more as possible, and as to avoiding it by giving up drink, he knew better! At all events—and he came steadily back to this in his thoughts—he would not, and he could not.

He did not. Within three weeks after the making of his will, Reginald Clint had brought himself to a state which, if he had deferred that proceeding, would, in all probability, have invalidated it. His temper, so far from being softened, was more than ever intolerable, and his tyranny such that there was great difficulty in keeping the domestic staff together. Florence bore the brunt of much of this, putting herself as far as possible between him and those whom he had habitually maltreated with his tongue, though never so grossly as now. Her task



was a hard one, full of most repulsive duties,—for disease spared nothing to the dying drunkard,—and there was no one to share them with her. In after-days she wondered how she was sustained in courage and in bodily strength throughout that time, with its ever-present horror and its agonising suspense.

Miriam was informed of her father's state, but Florence found herself obliged to add that Mr. Clint would not receive her unless she came to the Firs alone. He positively refused to admit Mr. St. Quentin into the house. This was a novel development of his extraordinary temper, and Mr. Martin and Florence were equally at a loss to account for it. But they presently discovered that he had, by dint of long brooding over the matter, conceived a violent animosity against Mr. St. Quentin, in consequence of his victory over him respecting

the conditions of his marriage with Miriam. He had been beaten on the point of the settlement; and his morose, ill-conditioned mind, beginning now to be touched with positive disease, ever seeking nutrition for its spleen and ill-will, had fastened on this fact with peculiar avidity. Miriam might come if she chose, but not the plausible old cheat she had married, and whom she would find out some day. She had been in such a hurry to get away from her father, that she had allowed herself to be fooled; let her take care she was not left in the lurch altogether. They could not extract from him any expression of a desire to see his daughter; beyond “she may come if she chooses,” he would not go.

Miriam would have gone to the Firs gladly, even on such slender encouragement as this; but she was destined to feel, in this instance, the full weight of the yoke under

which she had heedlessly and credulously placed herself. If her father was obdurate, so was her husband, and he had a threat to use which was potent. "You go nowhere without me. If you leave my house, without my permission, on any pretext whatsoever, you need never return to it. Let there be no further discussion of the subject." Miriam had ascertained that this was no vain threat, no imposition on her credulity, in the true spirit of a petty tyrant, but that he had the power to carry it out. So she submitted, and hardened her heart against the man who thus treated her—well-nigh driving him mad by her carefully-displayed contempt. She wrote to Florence full particulars of the battle, and, acknowledging Mr. St. Quentin's victory, declared her intention of rendering it more costly to him than any number of defeats. Florence in reply entreated her to write no more in that

strain ; she felt she could not bear it, in the deep gloom of the terrible episode through which she was passing. Miriam hardly understood Florence's feelings, but she respected them, and for some weeks their correspondence was almost limited to the dispatch of bulletins on the one side, and the acknowledgment of them on the other.

Reginald Clint asked no questions about his daughter. Whether he thought of her with affection and regret, or with bitterness and resentment, no one could tell. He was generally taciturn, even with Florence, but, at the worst stages of his illness, he was pleased when she was with him, and uneasy in her absence.

The night had come, cool, calm, and silent, after a day of much suffering to the dying man, and of incessant fatigue to Florence. Mr. Martin had left the house shortly before, and Florence's watch was soon to be relieved

for a few hours by a hired nurse, who had now been in attendance for some days. Mr. Clint had been asleep for a little while, and Florence, who was sitting by his bed, had allowed her weary lids to close for a few moments. When she opened her eyes she found the sick man had turned, and was gazing at her intently. A change in his face caught her attention immediately.

“Do you want anything, sir?” She approached him as she spoke, expecting the usual craving demand for stimulant, which it had long been useless and impossible to resist. But no such demand was made, nor did the dim, sunken eyes turn eagerly, as they had always hitherto turned on waking, towards the spot where the bottles were kept. He still looked at her, but did not reply. She held back the curtain, and inspected him more narrowly. The change struck her still more forcibly, but it was not

a painful alteration ; it consisted rather in general unlikeness to the face she was accustomed to see than in any threatening symptom.

"Where is Walter?"

He spoke the words slowly and distinctly, his eyes still fixed on her face. No answer. Florence never knew whether her body started, or in any way betrayed emotion, but she felt as if she had been shot.

"Where is Walter?"

She gently kneeled down beside the bed, and answered him in a soothing tone, notwithstanding her terror: "Don't you remember, sir? Mr. Walter is in California."

"I forgot."

He closed his eyes, and dozed for awhile—how blue and sunken his face was, how irregular his breathing!—and she knelt perfectly motionless beside him. It was the first time she had heard his father pronounce

her husband's name. Presently he roused himself, and sighed heavily.

"Are you in pain, sir? Can I give you anything?"

"No; I am in no pain—but my head is heavy. I thought Walter was here. I suppose I was dreaming." He spoke very slowly, and with gaps between the words. Then, after another pause, he went on: "I must have been dreaming that Walter was here, and there was something he wanted to tell me. I have not seen him for a long time."

"So I have heard," Florence ventured to say.

"I thought he would have come back sooner, but I suppose he is doing no good out there."

"I have been told that your son is doing well, sir, and that he hopes to return very soon, and prove to you that he has profited by his experience."

“Ah!”—in a vague manner—“it will be too late soon.” He drew his breath heavily, and his chest laboured. Florence rose, gave him some wine, which he drank without eagerness, and then quietly resumed her former attitude. “Walter and Miriam,” he said, “Walter and Miriam.”

“Should you be glad if they were here, sir? Do you wish to see your daughter? Do you want her?”

“No!” but there was no fierceness in his tone, no scornful repudiation of feeling; “I don’t want her—I don’t want anyone but *you*.”

No words came to Florence.

“I have not been so blind and insensible as you may have thought me. I know very well what you have been to me. I might have died like a dog in a ditch if it had not been for you, and I don’t want anyone else now.”



“Oh! sir, don’t say that! If only for my sake, don’t say that!” Florence had found words now, and was holding his passive hand in both hers, while still the ghastly eyes gazed into her face. “If I have been of any service, of any comfort to you, I ask for only one acknowledgment, for only one reward. Let me tell your children that you have thought of them with affection, that, whatever the cloud was which came between you and them so long ago, it has quite cleared away. Let me tell them this—to the daughter who will come to you at once, and to the son who will not be long in coming. I hope, I pray, I believe, he is on his way already. But whether he comes soon, or not until he cannot hear it from your own lips, let him know that he is forgiven. Whatever his faults towards you were, he has deeply, bitterly repented of them; he would give all the world can ever

bring him to undo them, or to know that they no longer dwell in your memory."

Unheeded, unconscious tears were streaming from Florence's eyes, and falling on her hands, and on that one which she held.

"Think of his long banishment from home, of his kind and loving heart—I do not think you ever knew him rightly—and spare him the anguish of knowing that you had left him unreconciled to him, that there was bitterness in your heart. I pray that you may be left with us until he comes home; but, lest it may not be so, say some words of comfort for him to me. Do say them—ever so few—here, now, to *me*!"

Her earnestness hurried her away from all caution and restraint, and yet she did not lose sight of her patient's state; her voice was not raised, and she knelt quite still.

"I dared not mention his name," she went on, "though I have so longed to speak

it to you, all these months ; but now, now that you have spoken it to me yourself, I do no wrong. Give me a message of reconciliation to your son."

"Give *you* the message? What do you know about my son? Why are *you* pleading his cause?"

Florence took a desperate resolution. She had not any doubt that Mr. Clint was dying. His son should not carry through life the burden she had found well-nigh intolerable for a few years. She resolved to tell him the truth.

"Sir," she said, "you have to forgive him many things, but one thing above all, and it is because of that great fault, that great sin against you, that I am pleading to you now. Only for that, I should not be here, and Walter would be beside you. I entreat you to pardon him, and me too, for I am Walter's wife!"

“Walter’s wife? You!”

There was surprise in the feeble voice, but not anger. There was something like awe, but not scorn.

“Yes, I—I, the girl you were told about—I, Florence Reeve.”

She laid her head upon her hands, still folding his, which he did not withdraw, within them; and there was no sound but her low sobs for some minutes. It was all over now; she had done the worst or the best she could, which it was circumstances must decide; but, whatever that decision might be, she was, at that supreme moment, conscious of a sense of relief. Her head was full of whirling thoughts, and her heart was beating fast with fear and anguish, but the burden both had carried so long was gone. No matter what else might happen, her husband’s father could not now die wilfully deceived by his only son.

“Married to you! And you here like a servant!” He spoke low and faintly, but she caught the sounds. “Tell me all about it. Don’t be afraid.”

Then she told him, without moving from her kneeling attitude, without loosing his hand, but checking her tears, and speaking in the soft, distinct voice which had been very pleasant to Reginald Clint for a long time. She went back to the death of her mother, and dwelt on Walter’s conduct to her at that time; and then she told of the circumstances which had led to their hasty and imprudent marriage. Mr. Clint seemed to understand her narrative perfectly, and to follow it with attention; she knew that he had in his mind the points of comparison between it and the story he had heard from Mrs. Clewer. Only one thing she did not tell him—that she had been led to believe the separation between Walter

and his father complete before she knew him. She would shield herself from no particle of blame, but him from all she could.

"We were both very young, sir," she pleaded simply, and now with perfect composure, "and very lonely, and we loved each other very much. I had no friend or protector except Walter, and he did this wrong thing for my sake. And then, when he had to leave me, because we were so poor, he wished to leave me near the only friends he had—for, indeed, Walter always knew you would be good to me, if the truth came out, and, and—if he never came back. And this too was done hastily, and because we were in a kind of desperation; and it was my fault, because I was foolish, and afraid of being left quite alone. I know I don't deserve that you should forgive such a great deception, but you will

forgive Walter—for it was all my fault? ”

No answer. But no withdrawal of the eyes, nor of the hand.

“ When I came back here, and you began to be ill, and were so kind to me, I determined to deceive you no longer ; but I could not tell you the truth without Walter’s leave, and I wrote to him, and entreated him to let me tell you, and ask for your pardon for both of us. His letter must come to me soon, and I know what he will say in it, and how thankful he will be to know that I have besought you for him.”

“ Who knows of this ? ” He spoke with difficulty, but her quick perception discerned the inflection of the old jealous pride in his tone. How many of those who lived in daily contact with him were aware of the trick that was played upon him ? To how many had he been an object of ridicule ?

“ No one. Not a living soul but Miriam,

and Walter, and myself. She has been the truest and the best of friends to me, and I sorely need her pardon too, for she did this for Walter's sake."

"For whose sake have you been to me all that she never was, or could be, or Walter either?"

In all his life Reginald Clint had never spoken with such dignity, or such softness, as in these few words, which held Florence spell-bound. When she replied, it was in the lowest whisper :

"For Walter's sake, sir, and for your own, because I love you."

Again there was a long pause, and then Reginald Clint turned restlessly, and with a moan of pain, and said :

"I believe you. There was one other woman in the world once who loved me—that is a long time ago—but no one else. Not Walter, and not Miriam, only their mother,



and you." He laid the hand he had drawn away from hers upon her bended head. "I forgive him, for your sake ; and I bless you, my child !"

While Florence was still kneeling, speechless and weak with many emotions, there came a knock at the door. She rose and noiselessly admitted the nurse, who said at once, on seeing her face, "Is he worse?"

"I think so," whispered Florence. "Come and see."

They stood together on the side of the bed nearest the door. His face was turned away, and he seemed to sleep. They interchanged looks, but no words. Florence resumed her former position, and there was profound stillness, until Mr. Clint opened his eyes and said to her :

"Who is there ?"

"Only the nurse. You do not mind her?"

"No; I don't mind her; but don't you leave me. Stay with me until the morning."

"I will stay with you," said Florence; and she drew her chair close to the bed, where his waking glance could fall upon her. The nurse sat within the shadow of the curtains on the other side, and thus the two women commenced their silent watch.

It remained unbroken for some hours. It was many weeks since Reginald Clint had had so much sleep, or such freedom from pain.

In the early morning he muttered a few words, and Florence bent over him to catch them. He was not asking for anything, and the words had no meaning that she could discern. He was only saying: "After all, I have done him no wrong!"

He never spoke again, coherently. A few

hours more, and his sleep had deepened into stupor, and, after two days, the stupor sunk into death.

## CHAPTER XII.

“AFTER ALL, I HAVE DONE HIM NO WRONG.”

IMMEDIATELY after it was made known in the village of Drington that Mr. Clint was no more, Mr. Standish presented himself at the Firs, and asked to see Mrs. Dixon. The state of mind in which the event, ensuing so rapidly upon the disclosure she had made, had left Florence, was exceedingly painful. She had an intimate, consoling conviction that her husband's father had not received her communication with displeasure, but this conviction she could not impart to any one, and she suffered extremely from the dread lest

the revelation she had been irresistibly impelled to make, should have in any degree, by the mere action of surprise, accelerated Mr. Clint's death. The end had come so unexpectedly, it had almost stunned her; and her position of responsibility, unbacked by recognised authority, was quite agonizing. In the very presence of the dead man, as she watched the bloated features settling into the calm which lends dignity even to such a wreck as Reginald Clint, the question would arise: What was she to do now? He was dead; not, indeed, as she had dreaded so that her powers of feeling seemed engrossed by that one terrible fear, without forgiving Walter; but nothing, except in point of that sentiment, was altered. He had forgiven Walter, and blessed her; but, let the dispositions he had made, if there were any such, in the time of his fiercest anger, his most obstinate estrange-

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ment, be ever so hard and unjust, they must remain unchanged now. It had happened according to the desire of her heart, but it was all too late.

There was something more appalling to Florence in this death than in any other which had ever signified anything to her. Here was the stillness, the solemnity, the decorum, the circumstance, the ceremonial of death—but no grief. A decent regret on the part of three or four persons, a formal gravity of demeanour observed by the dead man's servants, and tempered by much conjecture about their chances of mourning and gratuities. But grief there was none. No riven hearts, shrinking from the thought of a new day, to arise on their unwelcome life, yearning with horrid anguish over the least little remembrances of the one, so lately all-engrossing in action, as well as in thought, and suddenly become so terribly

unreal. Could there be anything so dreary and dreadful, Florence thought, as a house of mourning wherein were no mourners?

She had gone through the few sad formalities, and was resting, after having written to Mr. St. Quentin, to request that he would communicate the fact of her father's death gently to Miriam; and had just decided that she would consult Mr. Martin with respect to her own immediate movements, when she was told that Mr. Standish wished to see her. She went to the study immediately, and there she found the lawyer and Mr. Martin. Mr. Standish was seated in the place which Mr. Clint had habitually occupied, and the circumstance gave Florence's tender heart a stab. The place of *him* who lay there, upstairs, white and silent, already knew him no more. Florence bowed to the two gentlemen, and Mr. Martin placed a chair for her.

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"You wished to see me, sir?" She addressed Mr. Standish.

"Mrs. Dixon?"

She bent her head in assent.

"I received instructions from my late client, Mr. Clint," said the lawyer, with a formal civility which made Florence uncomfortable, "to make the contents of this memorandum," producing a paper as he spoke, "known to you and Mr. Martin as soon as possible after his decease. You will be so good as to take them into account in making the necessary melancholy arrangements."

Mr. Martin made no reply; and Florence had nothing to say. Mr. Standish then read the memorandum, which was signed by Mr. Clint, and consisted merely of a few lines, directing that his funeral should be very private and very plain, and that, prior to it, his will, which he had placed in the



custody of Mr. Standish, should be read.

"When it suits you to have this done," said Mr. Standish, addressing Florence, "I shall be happy to attend for the purpose." It was evident that she was expected to act in the absence of any direct representative of Mr. Clint. But she appealed to Mr. Martin, who undertook to do all that was necessary ; and it was finally arranged that the will should be read on the day before the funeral, by which time Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin would probably have arrived at the Firs. This agreed to, Florence rose and left the room, feeling a little curious, and disturbed by Mr. Standish's manner, which was, with all its formality, not quite respectful.

The hours dragged on, as they always do drag on while the dread presence of the dead is with the living, heavily and wearily. On the third morning, Miriam and her

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husband arrived. Mr. St. Quentin's sense of decorum did not fail him on an occasion in which there was no real sadness to him. He conducted himself with perfect propriety, but Florence was conscious of the displeasure with which he observed his wife's incautious greeting of her supposed maid. Mr. St. Quentin had a peculiar faculty of making his anger felt without transgressing good manners, by cold, ironical politeness and well-arranged contempt, which Florence remembered, and under which she had often cringed. She felt his anger in the slighting glance which passed over, but never lighted on her ; in the slighting tone of his bare acknowledgment of her ; the "How do you do, Dixon?" which made Miriam's face burn, and her eyes flash. When the sisters-in-law found themselves together, Miriam burst into a bitter complaint of Mr. St. Quentin's conduct towards her, even

before she inquired of Florence the particulars of her father's death.

"I do really believe he is mad," she said, "though there isn't much consolation in thinking so, since I cannot get rid of him by the conviction : he certainly is the most hateful and persecuting old man in existence. Do you notice how his bad heart and odious, suspicious temper are telling on him, Rose ? He is shrivelling up into such an ugly old man ; I am sure he looks many years older than poor papa did."

Florence was silently thankful that Miriam was never to know what her father had looked like in the last days of his life. The face had been hidden away for ever before his daughter's arrival ; and there was nothing to disturb that merciful process, to which the very best among us must owe so much one day, by which death blots out the memory of faults, and fixes the memory

of every claim which the departed had to urge upon the affection and regret of his fellows.

"He *is* looking old."

"Yes, and wicked—downright wicked. Ah, Rose, how wise and right you were when you warned me, in this very room" (she glanced around it forlornly), "that the way of escape I seized upon so eagerly might not be a way to happiness."

If Miriam had but known that the tyrant she had been so anxious to flee from had only a short time to live, how much might have been spared her! She did not think out this thought, but no doubt it was there, lurking in her mind; and Reginald Clint was, in this respect, reaping what he had sown.

Miriam heard Florence's account of her revelation to Mr. Clint with great interest and emotion, and without any participation

in the misgivings from which she was suffering. To Miriam's mind, the few words which her father had spoken were satisfactory and conclusive. Making the fullest allowance for his state at the time, and the near approach of his death, Miriam was not to be convinced that if her father had felt angry he would have concealed it, or been induced by any sentiment of gratitude to or consideration for Florence, to express any other feeling than anger. The last coherent words he had uttered—" *After all, I have done him no wrong!*"—duly reported to Miriam, were as inexplicable to her as to her sister-in-law. If they alluded to the rumours he had heard about Walter and Florence Reeve, they were not to be understood, unless he actually believed that a marriage had taken place; and any other meaning they might have had was completely out of the reach of the two young women. They

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might have been merely rambling, semi-conscious words, but Florence could not regard them as such ; faint though their tone, their manner was purpose-like. There was no conclusion to be arrived at ; they had to close their discussion where they commenced it. The whole of this day Miriam passed in seclusion in her own rooms. She had left Bianca in Paris, and Mrs. Dixon seemed to resume her former functions naturally. It was agreed between the sisters-in-law that after the funeral the truth respecting Florence should be told to Mr. St. Quentin. Miriam was much distressed by the necessity for the disclosure, but she had no choice. Florence was now homeless and unprotected, and Miriam must provide for her in some way, until her brother's return, let the terms of Reginald Clint's will be what they might. That Mr. St. Quentin would not permit her to fill her former position in his

house, Miriam felt assured, and she expected her to prove still more obnoxious as Walter's wife. The night closed around hearts full of anxiety, and disturbed by heavy care, in the house where lay the dead man for the last time but one.

"I am particularly directed, by the terms of this memorandum, to request Mrs. Dixon's presence at the reading of the will," said Mr. Standish, when, on the following day, he met Mr. and Mrs. St. Quentin, Mr. Cooke, and Mr. Martin, in the dining-room at the Firs, for this pre-arranged purpose.

At this announcement Miriam looked surprised, and Mr. St. Quentin looked angry and aggrieved.

"A most extraordinary direction, I must say," he objected, turning himself about pompously in the huge red-leather chair, which he had assumed with a president-of-

council kind of air. "What can *she* have to do with the matter?"

"That may perhaps be explained," said Mr. Standish. "With your permission, Mrs. St. Quentin, I will send for Mrs. Dixon." He stretched his hand towards the bell, but Mr. Martin prevented his ringing it.

"Stay!" he said; "I will go and fetch her," and left the room for the purpose, with an odd look of sudden intelligence in his face. He found Florence in the ante-room to that in which the coffin was awaiting removal, and told her his errand, adding: "There may be something agitating and painful for you in this, my dear; but you will, I am sure, be as you always are, patient and strong and self-possessed."

Florence glanced at him, as the unusual appellation in so unusual a tone passed his lips, but she said nothing; she merely rose, walked down the stairs by his side, and,



obedient to his gesture, passed into the dining-room in advance of him. Miriam, who was extremely pale, greeted her entrance with a faint smile, Mr. Standish bowed, and Mr. St. Quentin said, with disdain—

“You can sit down, Dixon. You are required, it seems, to hear Mr. Clint’s will read.”

Mr. Martin placed Florence between himself and Miriam, and, with a queer glance at Mr. St. Quentin, said to Mr. Standish that they were all ready and attentive. The lawyer then untied the outer cover of a parcel of no great size, which lay on the table before him, and broke the seal of a large blue envelope. It was evident that Mr. Clint’s will was no voluminous document; and the reading of it, after the accustomed preamble, did not occupy five minutes.

The will was as clear as it was concise. The testator bequeathed all the property, of every kind whatsoever, with an exception hereafter to be mentioned, of which he died possessed, to "the best, kindest, truest woman it had ever been his fortune to meet; to her who had alleviated the last months of his life, when both his children had forsaken him; to the only person in the world in whose disinterested services he had confidence, and to whom he now tendered this acknowledgment; to the young woman known as Rose Dixon, formerly in the service of Mrs. St. Quentin, the testator's daughter." The will appointed Mrs. Dixon sole executrix, and Walter Clint's name had no mention in it. Miriam's had a place, but an inconsiderable one. Mr. Clint bequeathed to his daughter the sum of one thousand pounds, and certain jewels which had belonged to her mother, with the agreeable

proviso, which Mr. Standish read out with an irrepressible twinkle of satisfaction in his keen grey eyes, that the money was to be allotted to her sole use and benefit, as the testator did not wish any advantage to accrue from him to the "wealthy cheat" his daughter had married.

Florence did not faint. She could not stand, or see, or speak, but she was conscious—conscious that Mr. Martin had taken firm hold of her—that Miriam, with a cry of "Oh, my darling!" had thrown herself on her knees beside her, and was clasping her round the waist and crying wildly—conscious that Mr. St. Quentin had struck the table violently, and declared, with a great oath, that the will was an unparalleled infamy, too bad for even the drunken madman who had made it, and that Walter Clint should break it—conscious that Mr. Cooke and Mr. Standish were profoundly silent.

Presently the room became steady, it ceased to swim before her eyes, and she found Miriam, rudely grasped by Mr. St. Quentin, and forced up from her kneeling attitude beside her; but Mr. Martin did not loose his hold of her.

"How dare you disgrace yourself in this way?" said Mr. St. Quentin to his wife, in a voice half-suffocated with anger. "What do you mean by calling this woman endearing names, by putting yourself on a level with a vile schemer, who practised on your mad and drunken father, and has done her best to rob yourself and your brother? A woman of whom I always had the worst opinion, and would have turned out of my house, if she had not left it for her own purposes. What do you mean by it, I say?"

"Mr. St. Quentin," said Mr. Martin quietly, "if you are not conscious of the extreme indecorum of your conduct on the present

occasion, and of the impropriety of your language, it becomes necessary for me to remind you that we who are present cannot permit you to behave in this manner. You must not apply such language to Mrs. Dixon."

"And who the devil are you, sir, that you should dictate to me?"

"I am Mr. Clint's oldest friend, and one of the witnesses to his will."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to acknowledge it."

"I had no knowledge whatever of its provisions. I am not prepared to say that I approve them; but I *am* prepared to say that the description which Mr. Clint has given of Mrs. Dixon is as correct as the epithets you have applied to her are unmerited."

"Indeed! My wife's servant seems to have made an extraordinary impression. I

believe *you* are a bachelor, and have money to leave away from your relatives. You and these gentlemen"—indicating Mr. Cooke and Mr. Standish, with a sneer—"are, of course, at liberty to think and act in this matter as you please. As for me, I consider this house no fit place for my wife, and I shall remove her from it forthwith."

"Hush! my dear; keep quiet," whispered Mr. Martin to Florence, who, shrinking into the recesses of her chair, and trembling, seemed to be trying to speak.—"I conclude you do not mean that Mrs. St. Quentin is to leave her father's house before his funeral?" he added coldly.

"I *do* mean it; I will not attend the funeral of the disreputable old drunkard, who was such a fool and such a scoundrel as to be led by the nose by a woman in this way." He turned suddenly on Miriam: "You will get ready to leave this house in

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half an hour, and during that time I forbid you to have any conversation with this person."

During this angry dialogue, Miriam had stood quite still beside Florence's chair, not touching her, not looking at her, but following every gesture of Mr. St. Quentin with her great golden eyes, filled with anger, disdain, and a terrible dislike. After he had pulled her up from her knees, she had shaken his hand from her arm, with a loathing shudder, as if a toad had touched her; and, even in that moment, he had been conscious of the action, and of the disgust which it betrayed. Miriam had never been so completely off her guard before; he noted the fact, understood it, and never forgot it.

When he uttered this peremptory order, she made one step forward, and confronted him, her face entirely colourless, her lips set, her eyes gleaming.

"I will *not* leave this house," she said, in a low, harsh voice, uttering every syllable with deliberate will; "either now, or at any other time, in obedience to you. Your detestable behaviour has broken down every barrier of restraint which would have prevented my speaking openly before these gentlemen, my father's friends and my own. I will remain here, and I will see as much as I please of her" (she touched Florence's hair with a caressing hand), "whom my father loved, who was more to him than I ever was, or would have known how to be; whom he has rewarded, to the best of his ability, and whom he appreciated at her proper value.—Gentlemen!" Miriam made a gesture with her hand which directed their attention from herself to Florence—"in a short time you must have known the truth, which Mr. St. Quentin's intemperate language obliges me to disclose before we had



intended it to be proclaimed. How false every word he has uttered is, you are all aware; you need nothing to strengthen your conviction of that; but even *he* will be ashamed of himself when he learns that this lady, my beloved friend, called here Rose Dixon, is Florence Clint—my brother's wife—and that before my father died, he knew it."

Mr. St. Quentin did not leave the Firs; but neither did he attend the funeral of Reginald Clint. He had been somewhat hotly pursued of late by a much-dreaded enemy, fatal to his most cherished pretensions to youthful energy and fascination—gout. Aided by the stormy emotions to which he gave their passionate way, it came up with him, and dealt him a hard blow. He found himself condemned to the double humiliation of being Florence's guest and Mr. Martin's patient.

When the wonder and excitement of these events had somewhat subsided, Florence and Miriam, comparing notes of their feelings, found that in the case of each the first conscious impression made by the reading of the will had been its elucidation of Mr. Clint's mysterious words, its explanation of how indeed, "after all, he had done his son no wrong."

## CHAPTER XIII.

LETHE.

“ARE you awake, Walter?”

“Yes. Have I slept long?”

“Three hours. And a sound refreshing sleep, I hope?”

“I feel much the better for it. I am getting on very well; am I not?”

“Very well indeed; you will soon be quite yourself again. Do you feel equal to a short palaver now, or shall we put it off until to-morrow?”

“Oh! no; I am quite able to listen, if not to talk much. Is there any news?”

Walter Clint asked this question careless-

ly, in a casual kind of way, not by any means with the eagerness and intensity of one just returning to the active interests of life, of one from whom they had been shut out through many long weeks of severe and exhausting suffering. It was not thus that Lawrence Daly had expected him again to take up the thread of life; it was with far other anticipations he had watched him gradually reviving to impressions of surrounding things, and resuming somewhat of his old familiar looks. The time had seemed intolerably long and wearisome to Daly, even when the first apprehension had subsided, and hope of Walter's recovery had taken its place. The unshared burden of the two secrets—that of the death of Walter's father, and the extraordinary turn of fate which had made the disinherited son the owner of all his father's property; and that of the hidden nugget—weighed heavily upon him. He longed ex-

ceedingly for the moment when they might be freely discussed between himself and Walter; when they should revert to the hopes which had preceded this time of trouble, and find them strengthened and perfected by the strange unexpected intelligence from the Firs. Lawrence had little or no apprehension about the effect which his father's death might produce upon Walter. There was such ample compensation in the narrative contained in Florence's letter, and the chances that any better understanding should ever exist between the father and the son had been, by Walter's own admission, so infinitesimal, that there was little to fear. It would be a shock to Walter, and a transient grief; but the good news was lasting, and a full realisation of all he could have hoped—a secure, happy, comfortable home, and a safe future for his young wife and himself; an end of their

trials and of their separation. Daly had almost persuaded himself that, even in his languid, half-conscious state, Walter must perceive that something unusual was occupying his mind ; but it was not so. Walter was quiescent, incurious, and even now, when directly appealed to, only moderately interested. There was no trace of the impatient, desperate eagerness to get away, to begin that homeward journey rendered possible by the acquisition of the nugget, which Daly had been prepared to remonstrate with and control.

The letters lay in the locker, and Daly sat near it, intending to take them out at the appropriate moment. Walter's wistful, thin, pale face, looking very handsome, notwithstanding its wanness, was turned towards him, and his head was supported on one almost skeleton hand. His hollow blue eyes were scanning Daly's face and

figure, which still showed traces of the illness he had gone through, though his recovery had been comparatively rapid, and he had not suffered physically from his late watching and fatigue.

"I have had a worse bout of it than yours," began Walter.

"Yes; very much worse, and lasting three times as long. Since you have been ill, several things have occurred which I want to tell you about; and first—there will be no difficulty, as soon as you are able to travel, about your getting to England."

"No difficulty! What do you mean, Lawrence?"

"I mean that strange things have occurred in England. Letters have arrived. Don't you remember we were expecting them just when you took the fever?"

"Yes, yes; go on: give me the letters."

"Presently. You must let me tell you

something about them. First, there is a great change in all your prospects, Walter."

"Is—is my father dead?"

"He is," said Daly solemnly, utterly surprised by the question, for Mr. Clint's death had not been likely, according to the former letters they had received. Walter said no more, but covered his face with his hands, and lay quite still.

"This must be a great shock to you," Daly began, after a long pause; but then Walter interrupted him.

"I don't think it is, Lawrence. I cannot explain or understand why, but in some strange way, during my fever, I think I knew it. I tried to tell you once or twice, but I could not be certain whether I knew it, or had dreamed it. However that may be, it is not a shock to me. My poor father! It was not a happy life. I trust it ended better. And now he cannot forgive me,



and I cannot tell him I was not the bad fellow he believed me. It is all too late."

Daly was not sorry to see that there were tears in Walter's eyes, and that his lips were trembling.

"It is not too late. This is the surprising news that I have known all the time you were in the fever, and have so longed to tell you. It was your wife who was with your father in his last days, and she told him all the truth, and got from him his forgiveness for you, and his blessing for herself."

"Good God ! Florence with my father—and she told him !"

"Yes ; she told him, like the brave, true woman she is, and so saved you both from the burden of self-reproach and regret. She is the wisest, as she is the best of women. Here are her letters : I opened this one—marked immediate—when you were

in the earliest stages of the fever, because I had seen the announcement of your father's death in a newspaper which came with the letters."

Daly put the little packet into Walter's hand. He looked at the covers; the seal of one was unbroken, but he could not yet open them.

"What has become of her?" he asked.  
"Tell me."

Daly told him. He related the contents of Florence's narrative, not, indeed, in the words of the wife, whose sacred and self-sacrificing love had been so freely poured out in the letter in which she summoned her husband home, that Lawrence felt as if he had been almost guilty of profanity in reading the words intended for those beloved eyes only; but clearly and convincingly. No more anxiety for Walter as to what had become of his wife, from whom he was

bidden to accept his rightful inheritance. The brief nervousness of astonishment, the brief bewilderment of mingled and contending feelings, passed rapidly away, and Walter was able to read the letters, which gave him a clear account of all that had happened, but from which he gathered that there had been one, of urgent importance, written by Florence, which he had never received. She spoke of her great anxiety for the arrival of his permission to tell his father the truth, in reply to her letter, in which she had repeated to Walter Mr. Martin's warning. That letter had not reached him. Had not Florence obeyed her instinct, with what bitterness the good fortune which had befallen them must have been dashed!

The first bewildering emotions subdued, Walter and his friend talked freely of the prospects thus changed, and of the future, so unlike any they had thought of. Daly

told Walter how hard he had found it to keep all this news to himself, while awaiting the moment of convalescence in which it might be safely imparted; and how anxiously he had looked for some disposition on his part to ask questions, and take up life once more from the active side. At this Walter smiled languidly, and said that he had not thought much of anything past, present, or future; there had been intangible impressions floating about him, but not thoughts, like that one about his father's death, and he had not been able to feel anxious; he believed anxiety was a doubtful privilege of health, which vanished before illness. At least he had not been able to feel it, either about himself or anyone else; it had awoke on behalf of Florence only with Lawrence's words.

Even now there was no impatience in his mind. Daly, while he could not resist the

pleasure of talking and letting him talk about the Firs, about his childhood, and his boyhood there, about all that he and Florence would now do to render the place pretty and pleasant ; in all which plans the presence of Daly was an understood thing—was afraid of the effect upon Walter. Now he would surely begin to count the intervening hours, and to fret at the remains of weakness, and the necessary delay before beginning the return journey. But the day wore on, and the young men still discussed the strange turn of their fortunes, and there was no nervous excitement about Walter to justify Daly's apprehensions.

“There are too sides to proverbial philosophy,” said Daly, in the course of their long talk ; “and we, at least, are in case to bear witness that if ‘it never rains but it pours,’ the shower is sometimes golden. How strange it is that this unexpected solution of

your difficulties, this fitting recognition of your wife's merits, and our own stroke of luck, should have occurred all about the same time."

"*Our own stroke of luck!*" repeated Walter.

"What do you mean? Not our two fevers, surely? With all your cheerful philosophy, I don't think you can reckon *them* as lucky."

The slightest possible misgiving arose in Daly's mind, as he replied:

"Fevers! No, of course not. Why, Walter, what can you be thinking of? I am speaking of our nugget."

"*Our* nugget! What nugget? Have you been finding a nugget?"

"Certainly not. One is almost enough, I should think, for us to expect, especially with a run of luck to follow."

An indescribable fear stirred among Lawrence's nerves as he spoke thus cheerily.

"One almost enough! My dear fellow,

I have not the slightest notion what you are talking of. Do tell me, pray ; I am prepared for anything after what you *have* told me."

"You are *prepared* ! Why, Walter, you are incomprehensible ! I am talking about the nugget which we found, and which caused us to determine on your returning to England in any case ; of the nugget which you concealed, you know, because you could not leave me in the fever, to go with it yourself to Placer-Ville."

A puzzled look in Walter's face, an uneasy straining of the eyes, but no light of returning memory or comprehension.

With increasing trepidation, Daly went on—"I am speaking of *that* nugget. You surely remember it, Walter ? Don't you recollect the day we found it, and how delighted we were—and how you were warned of the bad state of things in the valley, and

that we had better send off our dust as soon as possible—and then I was taken ill, and Spoiled Five came to you with another warning, and you hid the nugget?”

The tone in which Daly put these questions was full of distress and apprehension, more so than he knew, and it was responded to by Walter's painful, troubled, striving face.

“I don't know what you mean,” he said ;  
“I have not the least notion of what you are talking about. I remember the dust, and I remember the time being fixed for sending it to Placer-Ville. But I don't know anything more. Where is Spoiled Five? Is he not here? I have not seen him since I have been ill.”

“Good God!” thought Lawrence, “this is too terrible! Am I to bring her husband back to her a madman?”

“What is the matter, Lawrence? Why



do you not answer me? Where is Spoiled Five? And where is Sambo? He is not here, I know; the dog's bark I sometimes hear is not his."

"Spoiled Five has gone away," replied Daly, preserving his calmness by a desperate effort, and moving into a position in which Walter could not see his face. "He has gone a long way off down the valley, to do some hut-building. You remember, I dare say, that he was very much afraid of anyone who was 'off his head,' and when we both took to being so, in the fever, it was too much for Spoiled Five. Sambo is dead, poor fellow; he was killed by accident."

"Poor Sambo! And so Spoiled Five is gone! What a queer thing fever is, and how it sets one off on all sorts of imaginary tracks! I remember having a horrid notion that he had come to some harm, and being haunted with a longing to know all about

it, and yet afraid to ask—one of the phantom horrors of the fever! I wonder when he will return—before we go, I hope. Perhaps we could induce him to come with us? Flo would give him free quarters at the Firs, I am sure.”

Lawrence could not command his voice sufficiently to reply. The wooden cross, with its rough inscription, in the green God's-acre which had been spared to the dead out of the swarming valley, seemed to stand before his eyes. Walter went on speaking a few disjointed sentences before he could interpose with another effort to arrest his attention.

“But, to return to the nugget. Try and recall those days before you were taken ill. You remember Deering, the doctor whom you brought to see me, and who went away with the dust-waggon to Placer-Ville?”

"Yes," answered Walter, hesitatingly ; " I have some recollection of him."

"And yet none of the nugget? None of your coming in and finding him with me, and giving him your letters to your wife and your sister, and walking with him as far as the bluff?"

"No," said Walter ; " none."

"And yet you were, to all appearance, quite well that day, and for some days later. Have you no remembrance of telling me where you had been that morning, and what you had done?"

"I have no remembrance of anything about that time," Walter answered slowly, after painful searching in his mind. Daly took up his right hand, and looking carefully at it, found on the wasted wrist a white mark, the cicatrix of a healed cut. He made Walter look at it, and asked him if it did not make him remember something

—how he had cut himself with the rough rock in burying the nugget, and how Deering had dressed the cut with lint and plaster? But Walter, looking wistfully at the scar, and with the same painful groping in his unresponsive memory, declared that he remembered nothing of the matter. And, as he repeated this assurance again and again, there came a strange nervousness and avoidance into his manner, which Lawrence observed, but could not interpret. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and then, when Lawrence came within his sight again, looked at him from beneath that shelter, with a keen, searching, anxious glance, in which there was suspicion.

“Tell me this story of a nugget, which I ought to know, and have forgotten,” he said at length, when a long series of questions from Lawrence had been severally answered with the same protest of oblivion.

Lawrence complied ; and all the time he was relating the incidents which had preceded the murder—of which he carefully kept clear—Walter watched him closely from under his hand, and by degrees a look of comprehension came into his face, the expression of one who has arrived at a conclusion, painful indeed, but with the grim satisfaction in it of the solution of doubt, the termination of uncertainty.

“And where was it I told you I had buried the nugget, in obedience to Spoiled Five’s warning?” asked Walter, when Daly had recapitulated all that had occurred.

“You did not tell me anything about that,” said Daly. “I was only getting well at the time, and you said very little about it, only just enough to put my mind at rest. Then came your own illness ; and now you must do your best to remember where the nugget is, so that as soon as you are

able to be about, we may get it, and wind up our affairs here without delay."

"Very well," said Walter; "I will try to recall the place and the circumstances, when my mind is a little clearer; but I am tired now, and I really cannot think of anything but Flo's letter. So suppose we don't talk about it for the present."

"All right," said Daly, who was terribly disturbed and perplexed, and wholly unconscious of the anxious and apprehensive, regretful affection with which Walter was at that moment thinking of him, to the exclusion of the strange events which had befallen.

"What a dreadful thing this is!" ran Walter's thoughts. "Daly has never recovered that fever—he has a fixed delusion in his mind! What shall I do? There is nothing in it but to humour him, and keep him quiet, and to get him away as soon as possible."

Nothing more was said about the nugget that day. On the following, and two or three succeeding days, Lawrence tried by many indirect means to strike the dumb chord into sound, but in vain. Walter avoided all attempts to lead up to the subject, with a skill the origin of which Lawrence was far from suspecting, and which completely baffled him.

For some time the distress which this peculiar mental affection of Walter's caused his friend was so keen that he could think of nothing but its significance as regarded Walter himself; but as he lay awake, pondering over it, on the second night after he had discovered it, he bethought himself suddenly, of the double importance and value of the memorandum which Walter had made in his pocket-book. As soon as it should be safe to bring forward the subject again, the sight

of the memorandum in his own handwriting would, no doubt, remove the temporary cloud which had fallen upon Walter's intellect, and which had not invaded any other province of it, so far as Lawrence, by the closest investigation, could discern, and enable them to recover, without delay, the precious deposit, concerning which he had until now been so indifferent.

Early on the following morning, Daly made search for the pocket-book among a lower stratum of multifarious objects which had lain for weeks in the locker undisturbed. He found it, a shabby folding-case of green leather, spotted with grease, rubbed at the corners, and strongly scented with stale tobacco. With an instant misgiving, Lawrence Daly opened it, and found, not the collection of motley articles familiar to him as the contents of Walter's pocket-book, but



the small surgical instruments, the roll of lint, and slab of sticking-plaster, which he remembered to have seen in Deering's possession.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## FOR ENGLAND, HOME, AND BEAUTY.

THE result of Lawrence Daly's discovery was that he resolved to preserve perfect silence on the subject of the nugget, unless by some fortunate accident Walter should give an indication of returning memory. He immediately took the precaution of telling such of the miners as Walter was likely to see, that they must not talk to him of Spoiled Five, because the fever had weakened his nerves, and he could not bear it. The roughest and most heedless among them would not have refused compliance with his request. Walter had tired himself out, on

the day after he had read Florence's story, by writing to her at great length, in order to avail himself of an opportunity for despatching letters which then occurred. When at length he threw down his pen quite exhausted, it was with the remark, that he ought to have written to Miriam, but he was too tired, Miriam must wait.

"She will be disappointed," said Daly ; "lie down for a bit, and let me write from your dictation. I shall like it ; it is quite a new sensation for a lonely fellow like me to write a letter, even though it's not my own."

Walter gladly assented ; and the letter, a short but emphatic one, was written and folded to be enclosed in Walter's imposing despatch, addressed to "Mrs. Clint, the Firs, Drington, Hampshire." It was the first time Walter had written to his wife under her real name, and he looked quite fondly at the superscription, before he held out

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the document for Daly to take and seal.

"What shall I write on this?" asked Lawrence.

"Oh! just 'Miriam.'"

Lawrence complied. He, too, wrote the name very slowly, very distinctly, and he looked at it when it was done.

While the friends were busy with their preparations for departure, and Walter was taking it for granted, without the least suspicion or misgiving, that Daly was to accompany him to England, and share his home, always, if he chose, but at least for an undefined period, Lawrence was much occupied in debating with himself what he should do. In reality, he entertained no purpose of going to England. Why should he? Walter had become independent, by an extraordinary and fortunate accident; but his own position was not very materially better than it had been when they came out to the

Golden State. The few hundreds of pounds which would be his share of their joint acquisitions, exclusive of the nugget, which had but mocked him with an illusory success, a mirage of the mine—could not do much for him. Should he induce Walter to intrust his share also to him, and try his luck in the speculating world of New York, always reserving a sufficient sum to enable him to resume the old work, in the same or some other district? It would be hard for him to part with his friend; and Walter would feel it so too. But Walter had an entirely new life to face, fresh ties to form, old associations, of a date anterior to their meeting, to renew, and would soon cease to miss the familiar companionship. Lawrence had none of these things in the Old World; to him the New was as homelike, and it offered better chances. He would wait awhile, until the associations of their present

life should be broken through, and novelty had had its effect on Walter, before he would undeceive him ; and, besides, he had something to do at San Francisco, which was the first point they were to make in their return journey.

Deering had said he was going to "roll down New Mexico way," a sufficiently vague indication of his intentions, and one which would, had it been carried out, have precluded Lawrence from any hope of finding him. But he had heard, from some new chums who had arrived at the gold-fields during Walter's illness, that Deering had been seen at Sacramento, where he had been playing high but unsuccessfully, and that he had told several of the party that his intention was to go to San Francisco, and to take charge of a ship for New York—being inclined to give civilization and Wall Street another trial.

Lawrence determined to find Deering, if possible. He took it for granted that this man had Walter's pocket-book in his possession. If he had missed his instrument-case he would have come, or sent back to the lone hut to fetch it; but, finding the unsuspected substitute, he would be content, and go away without a notion of his loss. On the recovery of the pocket-book depended his sole chance of finding the nugget, and removing the cloud of oblivion from Walter's intellect. If he should succeed in recovering the clue to the hidden gold, he thought of proposing to Walter that they should part at San Francisco, when he would return to the scene of their toil and secure it in their common interests.

In many imperceptible ways, Lawrence tried experiments on Walter's memory before they commenced their journey, but they were all unsuccessful. In everything

connected with the incidents which immediately preceded the fever, it was a blank.

When they were fairly on their way—when the life of the lone hut, and the busy, toiling mining settlement, shut by the great mountain ramparts within the beautiful, desecrated valley, had been left far behind them—the impatience for which Daly had looked began to manifest itself in Walter. The time seemed endless to him, which at first he had hardly admitted to be tedious, and misgivings crowded fast upon him. By the time they reached San Francisco, Walter was almost ill with impatience, and Lawrence began to feel doubtful about the propriety of leaving him, even if he should find out Deering, and discover all he wanted to know.

To anyone not aware of the strange gap in his memory, there would have been no reasonable cause for inquietude about Wal-



ter, but Daly never forgot that fact, and he associated with it an irritable and impulsive manner which had come upon Walter. He could conceal from Florence the whole of the circumstances connected with the nugget, if they should ever meet, and the evil be still unattended; she need never be aware of her husband's loss of memory; but, supposing he were to show other symptoms of a mental shock or twist, one of those mysterious disarrangements of the mystic mechanism of the intelligence which baffle science—what then? *That* could not be hidden from her, and Lawrence dreaded to think of what she would suffer. In his bodily health he was very well, but the fever had considerably altered his appearance. He looked much older than he really was, and his once luxuriant chestnut-brown hair was thin, and thickly sprinkled with grey. Daly had remarked upon this to

him, wondering whether it was an ordinary result of the kind of fever he had had ; but Walter had told him it was hereditary ; at all events, his mother's family all turned gray in their early manhood and womanhood, and he should not be surprised to find Miriam white. He talked to Lawrence a good deal about Miriam, speculating gaily upon the surprise and discomfiture which must have been sustained by Mr. St. Quentin, and his probable feelings towards himself.

On their arrival at San Francisco, Daly set about inquiring for Deering without loss of time. He had a sufficient inkling of that gentleman's character to enable him to make a very fair guess at the sort of places in which he was most likely to be found, or to be "heard of." His intuition was not at fault, and in a few days he had discovered all that it was necessary for his purpose to

know. He must travel farther, if he would find Deering, who, after a few weeks passed in all the wildest and most dissipated scenes of "Frisco" life, had sailed, only six days before the arrival of Lawrence Daly and Walter Clint, for New York.

This was unfortunate, but not such a *contretemps* as it appeared. Lawrence felt reluctant to part with Walter, while so great an interval of time and space lay between him and his home. "What does it matter about me?" he would say to himself, half carelessly, half bitterly. "There's no woman, a thousand times too good for me or for any man, waiting for *me*; there's no one to mind whether I go back to the Placers, or on to New York, except Walter, and I will go with him; I will see him safely off to his pretty wife and his good fortune, and then—we shall see!" Deering had gone to Panama in charge of a passenger-ship as

surgeon, which did not look as if the rolling-stone had yet disproved the proverb ; and would be sure to be heard of at the agent's, and other places frequented by the ship's officers.

The arrangements for their sailing to Panama by the first ship were speedily completed, and then Lawrence carried out another project. There was resident at that time in the chief city of the Golden State a certain Dr. Drewitt, famous for his treatment of nervous disease. His practice was very extensive, for the nerves are sorely tried by the toils and the pleasures of life in that golden country, which ought to be the easiest in the world to live in, as it is incomparably the most delightful. But drink and excitement, the mad murderous violation of laws of health, the ill-treatment of the mortal machines by their unruly tenants, are too common there, and Dr.

Drewitt's hands were full. Lawrence called on this gentleman, and told him all the circumstances connected with Walter's sudden and extraordinary loss of memory. Dr. Drewitt listened to the narrative with attention and interest to the end, when he asked Lawrence whether he had been quite over the fever at the time it attacked Walter, and whether any intimation of danger to the dust they had on the premises had been conveyed to him at a time when his own mind was under the influence of illness? At these questions Lawrence smiled; perceiving the drift of the doctor's speculations.

"You think, perhaps," he said, "that the screw loose in this matter may be in my brain, and not in that of my friend—that I may be under a delusion, and he not the victim of a sudden interruption of memory. But it is not so. I am quite aware that, if such were the case, I should assert the con-

trary as calmly and as strenuously as I am asserting it now, and therefore I will say no more on that point ; but, if you will allow me, I will at some future time inform you of the result of the search I am bent upon making for Deering and the pocket-book."

Dr. Drewitt kept a steady gaze fixed upon Lawrence, whom it by no means disconcerted. "There are two sides to every story, wise people say," remarked the doctor ; "and I may perhaps wish to learn both sides of this one. Tell me as precisely as you can what was the latest impression, to your knowledge, made on your friend's mind before he received the shock which brought on delirium ; and what length of time intervened between his telling you about the concealment of the nugget and the commission of the murder."

Daly informed Dr. Drewitt precisely on these two points, and told him that he had

reason to believe Walter had felt the approach of illness before the night on which the murder was committed. Then the doctor, having taken a short time to consider his replies, told him that in certain cases of fever this partial and special loss of memory on the subject of the latest strong impression made upon the mind was, though not frequent, of occasional occurrence. It was an unaccountable phenomenon, and might be removed, as it had come, suddenly, at any time—perhaps years hence ; or it might never be removed, and there was no help for it. It did not necessarily imply any further injury to the brain, and was consistent with sound general health.

When Daly had taken his leave, Dr. Drewitt remained for some minutes leaning against the mantelpiece in his consulting-room, in an attitude of cogitation. Then he took out of a press underneath a row of book-

shelves an armful of newspapers, and selecting a few, after examination of their dates, searched carefully through their columns. He soon found what he was looking for, and began to read steadily. When he had done reading, he put away the newspapers, and proceeded to make some notes in a book which he took from a locked drawer.

"Mr. Daly is in the right," he said to himself, as he dipped his pen in the ink; "the other evidently knew nothing about the murder. The newspaper accounts of it entirely confirm that part of Mr. Daly's story; and that being positively, the remainder is presumptively, true. Very hard on him, if he does not find this other man! And certainly one of the oddest of the many odd things which have come in my way. When Mr. Clint called on me this morning, and explained that he had come to consult me, in all possible privacy, about the mental



condition of a friend whom he had reason to believe the victim of a delusion, a fixed idea—and I told him, as I have just told Mr. Daly, that there was nothing to be done, I never doubted the truth of the story for a moment. I wish I could see more of this case! It only proves once more what I learn every day—how much less wise I am than people take me for. No doubt I *shall* hear more of it, for, though he behaved most admirably, Mr. Daly winced under my suspicion, and will be so anxious to convince me that it was unfounded, that he is certain to let me know the result of his search. A very strange and valuable addition to my collection of puzzles.”

The advice which Dr. Drewitt had given to each of the friends tallied so exactly that it produced perfect harmony of action. Each was watching the other, in unspoken hope of a possible result, and the subject most fre-

quently in the thoughts of both was never alluded to by either.

During their tedious voyage Lawrence enlightened Walter respecting his own intentions. At first Walter was both angry and hurt; but by degrees Daly made him see and acknowledge the unreasonableness of his expectation that their life could be any longer in common, and he submitted. Daly then proposed that Walter should intrust to him his share of the proceeds of the "dust" they had found, for investment in some of the American enterprises which he had been studying of late, and to this Walter gladly assented. He had great reliance on Daly's judgment, which was not lessened or injured by his perception of that strange delusion which had grown up in Lawrence's mind since the fever, of whose persistence he was perfectly aware, though Lawrence was so careful never to allude to it, and

from any hint of which Walter shrunk with an uneasy nervousness. Indeed, he had the same sort of nervous feeling, though not to anything like so great an extent, about all reference to their life at the gold-fields. It had become not only indistinct, but distasteful to him ; and as it was inevitable that he and Lawrence should talk about it, he began to think he could be reconciled to a separation from his friend, which would lessen the vividness of their associations with a life which had become so suddenly and unaccountably painful to him to recall. And then Lawrence had promised to come to England after three years at the outside.

The voyage was irksome to them both, but especially to Daly. Walter slept a great deal ; he had acquired the habit of much sleep since his illness, and had pleasant plans and prospects during the waking hours ; but things were dreary with Lawrence.

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The ship was small, their fellow-passengers were uninteresting, the voyage was long; and when, having crossed the isthmus, they had once more embarked on the other side, and were steaming to New York, Lawrence assured himself that, even if he should find the clue to the hidden treasure, he would not undergo the toil of the journey again, while the small sum he could command should shew any inclination to increase and multiply. He would be satisfied with it, and leave the gold in its grave.

On their arrival at New York, they went to the post-office, with a vague hope of finding letters. It would be like Florence, they thought, to have written again on the chance. And she had done so. There was not much news in her communication, which was full of hope and joy in the prospect of her husband's return, and contained many affectionate assurances of welcome to

Lawrence Daly. She gave a droll description of Mr. St. Quentin's humiliation under the levelling rule of the gout, of his unwilling civility to her, and the haste with which he had departed, accompanied, sorely against the grain, by Miriam, so soon as he could extract an admission from Mr. Martin that it would be safe for him to travel. The St. Quintins were in Paris, and Miriam only less impatient than Florence for Walter's return.

At length the term of the long companionship of the friends had arrived. The last words had been spoken, the last hand-clasp exchanged, and Lawrence Daly, feeling very forlorn, was standing on the levee, watching the lessening form of the Cunard steamer, as she ploughed the blue water, long after he had ceased to distinguish Walter's figure on the deck.

The levee had been much crowded, but it

was getting clear. The people who had had business to do there had done it, and gone away ; and the people who had no business, and therefore stayed longer, grown tired of loafing and looking at ships, and listening to steam-hisses, were going. Through the lessening throng, a man came towards Daly, unobserved by him, as his gaze still followed the ship, and stood by his side, silent, for a few moments. Then the man touched him lightly on the arm, and spoke to him, and Lawrence Daly, turning his head sharply round, saw Deering.

**END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.**

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the 1990s, the incidence of *S. flexneri* infections has increased in the United Kingdom [10]. In the United States, *S. flexneri* has been reported as the most common serotype of *Shigella* isolated from children with shigellosis [11].

There is a paucity of data on the epidemiology of *S. flexneri* in the United Kingdom. In the 1970s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [12]. In the 1980s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [13]. In the 1990s, *S. flexneri* was the most commonly isolated *Shigella* serotype from patients with shigellosis in the United Kingdom [14].

The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of *S. flexneri* in the United Kingdom. The study was conducted in the United Kingdom, where the incidence of *S. flexneri* infections has increased in the 1990s. The study was conducted in the United Kingdom, where the incidence of *S. flexneri* infections has increased in the 1990s.

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